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AGROUND IN
THE SHALLOWS





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AGROUND IN THE SHALLOWS.

A Nobel,

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

C. RAY.

*Translator of "The Emperor and the Galilean," from the Norwegian
of H. Ibsen.*

Author of "Farm on the Fjord," "Catalan Bay," "Edelraute," etc.

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AGROUND IN THE SHALLOWS.

CHAPTER I.

"A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind."

As the two women bent over Mrs. Ramsay's insensible form, Miss Honey Vinegar feebly offered to stay and help, but conscious that her nursing qualifications were not of the best order, she did not urge it after the first refusal, and took her departure at the time appointed, unattended, except by the boatman who fetched her luggage. It was some time before Mrs. Ramsay came round, and for a day or two the shock to the nervous system made itself known by intense restlessness and moody silence. Not a word was said about Donald. Edith expected every hour some message would be brought. After three days a boatman appeared with a note,

asking her to pack up the clothes and books he had at Inverardoch Cottage. He said, in conclusion, that Harry Carmichael and he had taken rooms together on the lake, and that, sorry as he was at the cause of the parting, he was already feeling a great deal jollier than he ever was at home. Mothers and sons were best apart when they could not agree. As for money, he hoped to earn enough by his pen to pay for his rooms and board, and he must try and make his allowance go further than he had hitherto done. Would she write and tell Uncle Aleck about the quarrel. He did not care to do it. The letter was not sufficiently satisfactory to show Mrs. Ramsay. Edith questioned the messenger, and gathered within a little where Donald was to be found. She determined to write at once to Uncle Aleck, then either he or she must hunt Donald up, and try and smooth matters over. Meanwhile should she go and see Maggie? After many *pros*

and *cons*, she decided in the negative, and so three weeks passed away.

Uncle Aleck wrote, after the lapse of some days ; his letter was not long. He was sorry for what had happened, but so long as it did not interfere with his studies for the next examination, he was not sure that a little roughing away from the comforts of home would not be healthy for Donald, he had had too easy a life of it, riding roughshod over his mother and sister. The postscript was, as is not often the case in gentlemen's letters, the most interesting part of it to Edith. He had just met Montague Dewar. "He is looking horribly ill," it said, "and he told me he had been laid by in Brussels with fever ; had never, in fact, got beyond that city. I felt sorry for him, but, of course, Edith, you can judge of your own affairs best ; as for Donald's engagement, it will soon blow over, as such things do with young men. Every one of them goes through a succession of

desperate love affairs, as children do through scarlet fever, whooping cough and measles, but it will end all right, and he will marry, like other people, at last, one of his own set."

Montague had been ill, was ill now, and one after another blamed her for what she had done. It was certainly a hard case, only Aunt Isabel knew her sacrifice and her sorrow. Except God, and from Him alone could she now draw comfort, and strive to wait patiently for whatever might come.

One day Mrs. Ramsay insisted on calling at Glenbruach. Edith perfectly understood that it was to see Maggie, but she and her uncle had gone on an expedition over the mountains together; doing the civil to the minister's homely wife was all labour lost. The mother's gratitude for the supposed compliment to herself provoked her visitor, while the plain, ill-bred children, made anything but a favourable impression on the fastidious woman of fashion. She frightened them by

her brusque manner, and made them more awkward than they were by nature; and she returned more sullen than before the visit.

About a month after Donald's departure, the restlessness of her own mind made Mrs. Ramsay propose a day's shopping in Edinburgh.

Edith, with the secret hope of seeing Montague Dewar, assented eagerly. Her wish was gratified. As they turned out of one of the shops in George street, he suddenly confronted them, face to face, as he stood talking with a friend.

Edith was for a moment aghast. She had expected to see him pale, thin, and, perhaps, a good deal altered; but not to such an extent as a moment's glance revealed. He looked almost a shadow of his former self—eyes sunken, cheeks hollow, and hair sprinkled with grey. She noticed that, as he raised his hat, and steadied himself by the lamp-post near.

Mrs. Ramsay made no remark—neither did she, like Edith, return his greeting. The latter wished she had not seen him—that face, with its look of intense sadness, would haunt her night and day.

Full of her own sorrow, Edith escaped next day from the gloom of the deserted house, where Donald's voice and step no longer broke the quiet monotony of their daily life, and wandered up the glen.

The first frosts had turned a few leaves on the trees—the air felt chill and depressing. Mists were clinging to the mountain slopes, and dimming the brightness of the lakes. The summer was well-nigh gone, and decay begun. Before long winter would be there. The idea sent a shiver through her frame, and the thought of what the trial of meeting Montague Dewar would be, took from her the little heart and spirit left after Donald's unhappy departure.

She leaned against a damp rock, and fairly

burst into tears. At one time, she had so little cause to weep; now, tears seemed like her daily food.

“Ah! dear lady,” said a voice near her, and looking up, she encountered a pair of soft eyes, expressive of the tenderest pity, but full of glistening drops, themselves ready to fall over the long lashes.

“Maggie!” Edith exclaimed, stretching out her hands, and the two stood for some moments unable to speak, their mutual grasp saying more than words.

“Have you seen Donald?” Edith was the first to speak.

“Yes—have you?”

“No.”

“Oh! go and fetch him home soon, dear Miss Edith,” said Maggie, with entreaty written on every feature. “I do not like the companions he is with. Get him back to his mother—to you.”

“What has happened?” asked Edith, only too ready to take alarm.

"Not much, perhaps, yet; but I am in fear and dread of evil coming to him. You are not angry with me?" Maggie said, with earnest entreaty. "I know your mother is; but, indeed, I have always told him it could not be."

"I heard you tell him so with my own ears, Maggie. I saw you both one day, near here, when neither of you were aware of my presence. I am very, very sorry for you, Maggie. I do not blame you. Donald has been selfish and thoughtless. He ought to have had more regard both for you and us."

Maggie looked wistfully at her.

"I knew you would not like me to be your sister—poor Maggie Græme!"

She hid her face in her hands.

Edith put hers on her two shoulders, and spoke softly—

"Maggie, you are not alone in having to give up the man you love."

The hands were withdrawn.

“Have you had to do that?”

“Yes, and it was almost entirely on Donald’s account—that nothing might be prejudicial to him which I could help; but he would not give you up for my sake—I am sure of that.”

Maggie stood for a moment in thought. Then laying her hands on Edith’s, as they still rested on her shoulders, she said, with a look of intense sadness—

“It is not that we must think of now. He must be saved from wicked companions—from beginning evil ways, if we are not already too late. Oh! get him back to you again.”

Maggie was speaking with passionate earnestness.

“What do you mean, Maggie? Are there others beside Mr. Carmichael?”

“Three or four—not like Donald—wild, ill-doing young fellows; they will make him

as bad as themselves if we do not save him."

"How do you know this, Maggie? When did you see him?"

"He came to me at once after the quarrel with his mother. You will believe that I did all I could to make him return, and say he was sorry. I told him again I would not be his wife, that I did not care for him—in that way."

Here Maggie's tears gave doubtful confirmation of her words—

"He was angry—said it would make no difference; he should not go home again, and that I need not drive him to worse things. It is that I am afraid of. Oh! Miss Edith!"

"Poor child!" exclaimed Edith, sorrowfully.

There was no doubt about the real nature of her feelings to Donald, nobly as she was endeavouring to act with regard to his proposals.

"I hope things are not so serious as you picture them. There cannot be much harm done yet. I will go and see after him tomorrow. Can you tell me if he is still at the place where he first wrote to me?"

"Yes; he came again to see me last week, and I rowed him part of the way back; he seemed worn, and tired, and unhappy. I think all his money is gone; he would not let me go quite up to the hotel—he said he did not wish those men to see me—but I have seen them, and him, too, since."

"Where, Maggie? When?"

"As we were coming down from Ben Lomond. They were all at the hotel at the foot of it. Oh! it was a dreadful sight! They did not see me, nor uncle either."

"What was it?" said Edith, almost inarticulately—the power to speak seemed numbed by dread.

"He was making fun for them—red, and excited, and singing a horrid song—he

was—;” the word was scarcely audible, breathed into Edith’s ear; “they all were.” Again the women’s hands clasped convulsively; both knew too well the dread import of that word for Donald—Edith, perhaps, more than Maggie—and for all who loved him.

“Meet me here to-morrow morning at ten, Maggie—bring a boat—it is out of sight of Inverardoch, you are right, no time must be lost. How could I let him remain so long unsought! I will write again to my uncle, his guardian; but, meanwhile, you and I, perhaps, can do more than men could, in inducing him to return; can you get a man to row us, or shall we drive?”

“Let us go by boat,” said Maggie; “we can stay a little way off the place, and send the man on with a message. If we can only get him to talk with us, it might be all right; we would not let him return.”

“Your plan seems admirable, Maggie; I

will not be later than ten. God bless you, dear girl," she said, turning suddenly round, and pressing her lips to her forehead. "He will not forget your kindness to us all, neither shall I."

Maggie looked up with grateful eyes, and then stooped over Edith's proffered hand and kissed it, not with servile humility, but as an acknowledgment she was conscious of the difference between them in station.

Edith felt that her mother was the next person who had to be talked into a reasonable view of circumstances. Accordingly, in the twilight of the fast closing October evening, she began her difficult task.

"Mother, I am afraid Donald is not going on satisfactorily; he must be brought away from the place he is living at, if possible."

"Where is he?" asked Mrs. Ramsay; "did you, or any one else, with any sense, expect that he would go on well?"

"We must do our part, mother, in meeting

him half-way on the road to reconciliation. He is at a small hotel on the lake with Harry Carmichael, and a set of wild young fellows. I am going to try and persuade him to return home with me to-morrow."

"Miss Ramsay tramping about from one public-house to another as a drunken cobbler's wife does after her husband!"

"Oh! mother, it is not so hard as that; but there is no telling what may be, by-and-by, if the mischief is not stopped at once. You will let him come back, won't you?"

"I haven't a heart as hard as the nether mill-stone yet, Edith. Do you really suppose I would turn my son away?"

"But you will not reproach him about what has past?"

"I had better, perhaps, have Miss Maggie Græme here ready to receive him, on the principle of 'be a good boy, and you shall have a sugar plum!' No, Edith, I cannot go quite so far as to say I will never remonstrate with him on the subject."

“Nor do I ask that you should, mamma; only do not be constantly exasperating him, and rubbing him the wrong way.”

“It is a new state of things, now-a-days, when the children, not the parent, are to be considered.”

“I fear it was always, more or less, the case,” answered Edith. “David had his Absalom, Eli and Samuel their unruly sons, they all needed patience and careful management.”

“And all came to destruction in the end, whether they had it or not,” said Mrs. Ramsay, gloomily.

“God forbid it should be so with Donald,” said Edith fervently. “I shall get him back then, mother, if it be not too late, and you will be glad to see him.”

Edith stood by her mother’s chair, and her eyes pleaded more earnestly than her words.

“Ay, ay, child,” said Mrs. Ramsay, with a traitorous tremour in her tone, and thus the discussion ended.

Next morning, at the hour appointed, she found Maggie ready with a boat and man. A little qualm of conscience troubled her, as to the justice of availing herself of the girl's affectionate anxiety. She had no doubt what her mother's opinion would have been. "After all, it is only social pride that stands in the way of their engagement," she said to herself, as she watched Maggie deftly handling the second oar, "she is pure and gentle, and certainly beautiful as a rosebud." Maggie seemed labouring to work off excitement, the boat flew over the water, past the banks where the bracken was turning yellow and brown, and the trees were as gay as the red whortleberry beneath them. The morning mists had crept some way up the mountains, and clung like a swan's-down tippet on the shoulders of Ben Lomond; blue and sharp, the summit reared itself above them.

"Is it not lovely?" exclaimed Maggie, resting for a moment on her oars, and look-

ing up; "why do people need any other pleasure than the sight of such beauty?"

As they steered towards the place where Donald lived, they were suddenly hailed by a figure on shore.

"Why, it is Willie!" exclaimed Edith; "what brings him here? Let us row to shore and fetch him."

As soon as they reached the edge he jumped in, and stared wonderingly at Maggie. "Miss Græme," said Edith, by way of introduction; "she is staying at Glenbruach with her uncle, Mr. Macnaughten." Willie was evidently quite innocent of the relations between Maggie and his brother.

"How pretty she is, Edith!" he said, too low for her to hear; "but I wish she were any where else just at this moment. I was on my way to tell you about Donald."

"What is the matter?" asked Edith.

"Everything is the matter! He has been spending money right and left, with Harry

Carmichael and his crew ; drinking hard into the bargain ; he wrote to me for money, begging me to think of some way of getting him away from them. I don't care to repeat the words he used in describing their life. I came over an hour ago with what cash I have, and found him in bed ill, or pretending to be, perhaps, to keep out of the other fellows way. What a kettle of fish you seem to have cooked up since I was at home a month ago."

Edith looked at him in surprise ; there was a decision of manner and voice, quite unusual, as if denoting a totally different being. How did you leave the Carshaltons ? "

Willie looked oddly at her. .

"I have not been there."

"Where have you been ? " she asked, inwardly dreading some fresh complications in family affairs.

"In Switzerland," he answered ; "Mr. McCorquedaille gave me permission to take a

fortnight's holiday, and what is more, sent me a cheque to pay my expenses, and an invitation to join them there. Oh! Edith, I have had a jolly time."

"Why did you not tell us, Willie?"

"I thought you would not care. I know mother does not take a bit of interest in me." Edith's heart smote her; she had scarcely thought of him all the past month; strangers were gladdening him with the kindness he missed at home; "and Mrs. Carnegie and Nellie, how are they?"

"Both send their love; they will be home in another month, but you will not hurry away. The McCorquedales came home with me. What a brick that man is, Edith; one of Nature's aristocrats of God's own making."

Here was Willie giving her a lesson. Edith felt, what, if her discarded, distrusted lover were one of Nature's aristocrats? Their talk had gone on in a low voice all the time.

At last the boatman and Maggie shipped their oars.

“Had we not better stay here, Miss Ramsay?” Maggie looked uneasily at Willie. “Will your brother go up to the inn instead of the boatman?” She knew Donald’s brother very well by sight, though she had never before spoken to him, and could only judge of his character from her lover’s disparaging, not to say sometimes contemptuous descriptions of him. His appearance disturbed her the more on this occasion as she doubted his having the necessary tact and skill to manage the affair of getting Donald away—he had spoken too low for her to hear of his having sent for him.

“Yes, tell him we are here, Willie—Maggie Græme and I—be sure you say that. We can wait any length of time, if you can only get him to return with us. Never mind his luggage, we will send for that later.”

“Miss Græme has become quite an intimate acquaintance since I was at home, I presume,” said Willie, in some bewonderment of mind.

“Yes, and one I am very glad to have made,” said Edith, with a bright look at Maggie, whose blushes as she busied herself over the oars, added to her beauty.

“I ought to apologise for having allowed you to row so far,” Willie said; “but to tell truth, I am no oarsman, and hesitated at displaying my incompetency before you, Miss Græme,” so saying, he lifted his hat and left them.

CHAPTER II.

"If thou seek this or that, and wouldst be here or there, the better to enjoy thine own profit or pleasure, then thou shalt never be at peace, nor free from trouble of mind."

As Edith and Maggie sat waiting and wondering, so often the part left to women in the stirring events of this world, both were thinking of Willie. Edith, astonished and grateful for his coming out in such a new light at the moment his help was most needed. Maggie wondering, lest this brother, whom she had only heard of as shy, and odd, and queer, should just spoil all their endeavours.

The inn was a rustic little place, frequented by fishermen and sportsmen, and occasionally an artist; sometimes, also, as now, the resort of a set of wild young men, who, under the pretence of using the rod and gun, spent their time in drunken idling, if the active

debasement of such a time ought not rather to be called drunken mischief.

Donald was still in bed, but Harry Carmichael and his friends had departed on some expedition for the day. This Willie learned of the landlord, before he went upstairs. Ignoring the fact of his being ill, Willie opened the bedroom door, and said—

“Get up, Donald; who do you think are here?”

“How should I know? and what do I care?” grumbled Donald. “I don’t feel well enough, nor yet inclined to see any one.”

“You are not likely to get much better if you lie stewing in bed with the window shut; the room is like an oven.”

Willie strode round the bed, and opened the lattice, letting in the fresh air. Donald coughed.

“I tell you what it is, Donald, if you carry on this little game much longer, you will go

into a consumption ; what business have you with a cough ? ”

“ It hurts me here,” said Donald, putting his hand to his left side.

He was evidently frightened and nervous about himself.

“ You ought to see a doctor, and get some good nursing,” replied Willie, decidedly ; “ but don’t you want to know who is here ? ”

“ No,” said Donald, “ I don’t want to see any one ;” he was ashamed to meet any of his decent acquaintances ; “ if Edith knew I was ill, she might perhaps come.”

“ Exactly what she has done—not that she was at all aware you were out of sorts, until I told her. She has such a pretty girl with her.”

“ Why, in the name of goodness, didn’t she come alone ? ” said Donald, turning on the pillow, and dragging up the clothes he had partly thrown off him.

“ I wondered why she brought her ;” said Willie.

“Who is she?”

“Some acquaintance made since I was in Switzerland.”

“You are a lucky dog,” replied Donald, “I wish I were in New Zealand, or somewhere a few thousand miles away.”

“Lying in bed won’t help you there. Get up. She is a Miss Græme—Maggie, Edith called her.”

“Who!” exclaimed Donald, sitting up in bed with great vigour; “Maggie Græme, and with Edith?”

“Yes; what the dickens is the matter with you? not much if you can kick the clothes about like that. You seem pretty firm on your pins, too, for a sick man; get your things on and come down; they are waiting for you in a boat, up there, behind the rock.”

Donald needed no second injunction to make haste. As he thrust his hands into his empty pockets, he said—

"Have you stopped the old beggar's mouth downstairs?"

"Partly; I think Edith will see to the rest; but, Donald, it's an awful sum to have spent in one month. I don't know what Uncle Aleck will say."

"Hang Uncle Aleck, and everybody else," muttered Donald; "I know I've been a fool, but that doesn't say I mean to go on being one; hold your tongue, Willie, and don't preach; you need not fear you will not get your money back again. Magnus will send me something soon, I hope."

"I was not thinking of my money," Willie said, hurt and angry, and inclined to say some sharp things, but his mind turned to the people and prospects that now made his life happy, and kept silence.

"However came Maggie to be with Edith?" repeated Donald, thinking aloud.

"Is she a lady?" asked Willie; "she is very pretty, but I observed she was not at home; there were certain little things—"

Donald kicked an unfortunate footstool out of his way with a violence that warned Willie he was on dangerous ground.

“Don’t you know who she is?” asked his brother, at last, fiercely; “she is little wee Maggie at the farm, where I was nursed after my accident, years ago. She may not be so fine, or *distinguée*, as the girls of the period, but if I don’t marry her, I will marry no one, to the day of my death. That’s what the quarrel with my mother was about.”

“O——h!” said Willie, and a long silence ensued. Whatever he thought, this was no time to say it; only Edith’s having her in the boat seemed more inexplicable than ever. That was what the squabble had been about.

“Shall I go down to them and tell them you are coming? They will wonder what we are about.”

“Yes, and I’ll write a letter to Harry to say he need not expect me back; he’ll be in a rage when he comes and finds me gone.”

“So much the better,” said Willie. “I

could wish him at the bottom of the lake, if it were pious to do so."

"I didn't know you set up for saintliness," sneered Donald. "Is that Nellie Carnegie's style? You are a deuced long-headed fellow, Willie! becoming McCorquedaille's right hand, and looking after his niece—the probable heiress of her uncle's fortune. You can afford to patronise your scapegrace younger brother."

Willie would have willingly kicked the much-persecuted footstool now, but he bit his lips, and ran downstairs.

"Is he coming?" was Edith's question from the boat; it was hanging also on poor Maggie's lips, but she felt that Willie was looking curiously at her. Somehow the difference of rank made itself felt during this first acquaintance with Donald's family. Maggie wished herself at home, in the old farm, or that the days of childhood could come back again; that would be best of all.

The tears gathered unbidden in her eyes, but the two were talking busily, and she had time to wipe them away unseen.

She caught sight of Donald walking rather feebly down the path. She wanted to go forward and break the awkwardness of the first meeting, but the brother and sister were nearer to him in all ways than she was at that moment.

At last Edith became aware of his approach, and sprang out of the boat. Maggie clasped her hands, as he stooped and kissed his sister, and, forgetful of Willie, dropped them upon her lap with a murmured "Thank God!" She remembered his presence instantly.

"I know all about it, Maggie," he said, stretching out his hand kindly; "you are glad as we are to get him back again."

The fair young face had touched him; the true love in it appealed to those same happy thoughts which had kept him from quarrelling with poor Donald. His eyes had been

searching in the boat long before he reached it. He was pale, his eyes had a glassy look ; everything spoke of late hours, and the foolish, furious drinking. His flesh was puffy and flabby ; he was not the Donald of old, and never could be again. The foul, loathsome life of the past month had set its signs upon him, that he would never lose while he breathed.

He knew it, when Maggie involuntarily rose to steady him as he got into the boat. He condescended to let her help him, man as he was ; he could only say "Maggie !" with a humbled, troubled look.

"Shall I take the oar ?" he said, with intuitive courtesy ; "Willie is no rower."

"No, thank you ; I like it," Maggie answered, and he was aware he could scarcely pull a dozen strokes with that dragging pain in his side. As for Maggie, it was fortunate for her she had something to do ; she did not dare to look at the altered face ; she felt ashamed

with, as well as for him. The big eyes, she knew, were seeking hers, speaking penitence, and imploring forgiveness ; but she bent to the oar, and looked anywhere except at him.

“Where are we going ?” Donald asked at length of Edith.

“Home to Inverardoch,” she answered ; “mamma expects us.”

There was no answer, Donald felt weak in will as well as in body ; bluster would have been utterly out of place ; and in his secret heart, the thought of release from Harry Carmichael and his friends, the pure speech of women, and home comforts, after the bald misery of the inn, and the coarse ribaldry of his late companions, wore such an aspect as a glance of Paradise might to a sinning soul, freed from the pains and penalties of Purgatory. He would have given a good deal to say with Rosalind—

“I could find it in my heart to disgrace my man's apparel, and to cry like a woman,”

but he had the strength left to consider that—

“Tears do not become a man.”

The journey was a silent one, none felt inclined to talk; as they neared the place where they started in the morning, Maggie said—

“Shall we put you out here?”

“It would be better,” Edith replied.

When all had landed, Edith went back into the boat, and taking Maggie’s hand, she said, almost in a whisper—

“I cannot ask you to come with us to Inverardoch; but we shall meet at your uncle’s house, perhaps. I am very grateful to you, Maggie—more than I dare acknowledge now.”

“Will his brother fetch his luggage and his books? Or shall I return for them at once? It would be as well,” she added, seeing Edith hesitate; “he will find them all ready in their places to-morrow.”

“Thank you, Maggie, it would be the quickest way, and be done with less fuss. But I do not like you to go.”

Maggie did not stop for her to change her mind; again the boat disappeared round the point. Arrived at the inn, Maggie, with the help of her staunch friend the boatman and the innkeeper's wife, collected Donald's belongings; while doing it, the woman said—

“I dinna ken gin ye be the laddie's sister, or his sweetheart, but I'm aye canty that he's aff and awa', and wi' his ain folk; he was ower guid to keep company wi' sic loons. Mony a time I hae thocht I maun e'en hae tell't him to gang clean frae them a'; but it's no' canny to tak' the bread oot o' yer bairnie's mou' yersel'. I hae said aft to Duncan, my guidman, ‘ance eneuch to keep the wolf frae the door, I'll hae nae mair o' livin' aff ither bodies' ill-daen.’”

Donald went early to bed; the meeting

with his mother had been no small trial, and he longed for freedom from the restraint of her presence. His eye fell at once on his books, ranged as usual on the table, and in the bookcase; and his clothes were neatly folded away in their accustomed drawers.

"Edith," he said, when she came in for a word before going to her own room, "it is no use saying how sorry I am—I will try to prove it in my future life—but," he hesitated, "tell me how you found Maggie?—did you go and see her?"

"No, I knew mamma would never suffer that. Oh! Donald, what a charming creature she is! Do you sufficiently realise how cruel it would be to deceive her, and forsake her in future years?"

"I am not wholly a brute, Edith," Donald answered; "I love Maggie truly and dearly. I am only afraid she will never trust me again; and will refuse to take such a fellow as I have proved myself to be for a husband.

She has said all along she will not marry me."

"She brought back all your books, Donald—her own thought—that you should find them here."

"Bless her!" said Donald, and turning to the wall, Edith bade him good-night, and left him to consider how hard is the way of the transgressor.

Next day Maggie went home; Donald had no chance of seeing her again for some weeks. Their own return to town did not take place for a month, until Mrs. Carnegie and Nellie came back—then the old winter life began, with the same monotonous round of duty and pleasure.

Harry Carmichael rallied Donald on his sudden departure, but it was in a mild, half apologetic way.

"To tell truth, I began to be sick of those fellows myself," he concluded; "and I thought you did the best thing to go—only

you need not have given us the slip when our backs were turned, old boy. I suppose you are reading now like a steam engine. I wish I had stuck to some profession—stupid of the governor not to make me do something—my mother wouldn't let me enter the army, the only career for a man with money—afraid I should get killed. I am more likely to kill myself at this rate—culpable homicide of a good-for-nothing fellow—ha, ha."

"Why don't you travel?" said Donald ;
"I should, if I had your means."

"Ah! not a bad thought—go round the world—rusticate in New Guinea, study the Pacific islanders—go to Hong Kong, instead of being sent there, eh?—better than stick in Edinburgh, where there's nothing for idle people to do; every body is so confoundedly busy—got some hobby that they ride to death—straight over other people's heads; I always feel in the way. Bless my heart! why wasn't I bred a professor?"

Donald laughed, "Not much in your way, old fellow; too late, at any rate, to think about it now; you had much better take up Central Africa."

"And get out of your way, eh?" said Harry slyly. "Well, I'll think about the matter." He was turning into his club, when he said, suddenly, "By-the-bye, who do you think I saw the other day?—never was so surprised in my life!—don't know when I've seen such a deuced pretty girl! Enquired who she was, and found out it was the very little girl you kissed—no, whom you didn't kiss, when you cut your forehead. I tried to make capital out of our former acquaintance, but she wouldn't see it; couldn't get her to be civil anyhow. You had better try your luck; you know the way to the farm." Donald's brow darkened; at last Harry saw it. "I didn't mean to offend you, by referring to by-gones—I forgot you never like any allusion to that evening. But you just go and look at her—ta, ta."

Harry disappeared in the well-lighted entrance of the club, and Donald went on. This mention of Maggie brought back the old longing to see her. He had kept away hitherto out of shame; but once spotted by men of Harry's stamp, she would be observed by them all, and his soul revolted against the idea of her becoming the talk of such characters.

"I must see her, and obtain her promise, this very night," he said, half aloud.

It was a raw cold evening, there was a feeling of snow in the air; the walk would be long and dreary. The craving came strongly upon him to enter one of the warm hotels, and get something to drink—one glass of hot toddy before he started—but Maggie would be sure to find it out, and would bother him again, as she had done many times before, to take the pledge of total abstinence. Such an absurdity! He had been, and was still, determined to re-

sist stiffneckedly;—it was such an open acknowledgment of weakness.

“It is a simple impossibility, in our rank of life, Maggie,” he had said to her on a former occasion, “to sit down to every meal with the certainty of being laughed at by every one at table—it is asking too much. I cannot do it, even for you.”

“Admitting, in fact,” she answered, “that you would bear the trial of ruining your own happiness, and that of those dearest to you, but not of being laughed at; that does not speak much for the courage of your sex, does it?”

“Women are just as foolish about old fashioned clothes; they would as soon lose one of their fingers as persist in dressing unlike other people.”

“That is harmless and inexpensive compared to the fashion of drinking, Donald; a fashionable dress does not fly to the brain, and spread disease and mischief there.”

“But it may fill up the heart with vanity, and cost a good bit of money, too, Maggie.”

“Because women are foolish, are men to be no wiser, Donald? I don’t defend our follies, which by-the-by you help to foster—anyhow, they are no excuse for your evil habits.”

“What do you know about them, little witch?”

“Nothing, except by their effects,” she answered; “but I cannot see much difference between my old terror Jemmie Patterson, who regularly breaks his wife’s head every time he comes home the worse for liquor, and your gentlemanly rogue, who breaks his wife’s heart by slow degrees. The broken head can be remedied, the broken heart admits of no cure. If we all set to work, we might soon do something towards saving the millions of pounds which are worse than wasted on drink;—think of two and a-half millions spent every week, Donald. I wish

it were death for women to taste wine, as it was in the time of the Romans."

"I have been supplying you with weapons against myself, Maggie; what has given you such a horror of this vice in particular?"

Maggie placed her hand on his arm, and all the deep feeling of her woman's heart sprang to her eyes, as she answered—

"The vision of a boy, with his face on my knees, the tangled clotted hair dripping with gore, my childish dread of that boy's soul, called away to give account of itself before its Maker; Donald, I can never forget that! Could you bear to see a delicate creature, clad in lace, sparkling with jewels, called a woman, reeling and mad with drink? Have you ever seen such a sight? If you have, will you ever forget it?"

Donald winced.

"I am not sure," he answered; "if I have, it must have been very long ago; it is a dreadful thought."

His mind wandered back to some half remembered scene, that might have been a dream, it was so far back in the dim past, of a form lying on a sofa, in the twilight of an autumn evening, and of a man coming in, trying in vain to rouse the sleeping woman ; of his carrying her upstairs in his arms, and then sitting by her, long—long with bowed head, and then of the same man taking a boy in his arms, and sobbing on his shoulder, and bearing him gently to another room—was it a dream ? Who were the actors ?

Maggie roused him from the reverie, the dim recollection of that scene brought on, by repeating—

“ It is a dreadful thought ! any debasement of the soul and body God has given us, is a sad and solemn warning. You, Donald, have led me on to think, and now I cannot stop ; a sort of commission seems laid upon me, to save all I can from this foul pestilence ;

shall my dearest friend be left beneath its influence?"

"Do what you will with me, Maggie," Donald answered; "I am clay in your hands; if women knew the power of goodness, and purity, they would never soil the whiteness of their garments; only, I want you always near me, to be my guardian angel."

This was the last talk they had in the old farm house garden, before the flitting to Loch Lomond. It recurred to his mind now, with double force, and stopped him from indulging in the craving; he passed out into the open country.

CHAPTER III.

"There is no great trust to be put in a frail and mortal man, even though he be profitable and dear unto us."

THE wind had well-nigh completely numbed him throughout, as Donald knocked at the door of Burn Loupit; he had stumbled on in the darkness, sorely tempted to turn back, but something seemed urging him on; a month or more of hard study, and struggle against temptation, deserved approval, and forgiveness, and the solace of Maggie's presence. When therefore, her mother opened the door, with the exclamation—

"Gude save us! Maister Donald; what gar'd ye gang oot sic a nicht?" he felt the fact of his coming certainly ought to weigh somewhat with Maggie.

"I wanted to see Maggie, is she within?"

"Ay, but ye're no muckle early; she'll be gane the morn."

“What do you mean, Mrs. Græme?”

“Eh! but she maun e’en explain it herself; its abuve my comprehension,” and the mother sat down in the chimney corner, and put her apron over her eyes.

“Shall I call Maggie? Is she upstairs?” Donald said, a strange sensation creeping round his heart. “Where is the guid man?”

“He’s just gane to the toon, to borrow a cart, ours is no’ fit to carry her bit boxes the morn.”

Donald walked straight to the staircase, enclosed by a door at the back of the mother’s chair, as he had done many a time before, and called Maggie; but this time it was with doubled impatience.

“Come down, and tell me, for heaven’s sake, what this means.”

“Is it you?” she said, coming to the head of the stairs. “What a night for you to have walked out.”

He stood waiting for her, holding the door in his hand, and beating his foot irritably on the floor ; at last she came, with a travelling bag in her hand. He shook hands with a troubled face, took the bag from her, and set it on the table.

“ Where are you going, Maggie ? I don’t understand what is on hand.”

They stood side by side, before the blazing fire, the logs were sputtering and crackling merrily on the open hearth.

“ I am starting for Australia, to-morrow,” she answered, very quietly. Donald looked at her as if he did not comprehend. “ It is true,” she went on, while the mother stole softly out of the room, to let them have their talk out alone ; “ I have taken a situation as governess, in a family with four young children ; we start together for Plymouth to-morrow.”

“ What made you do that, Maggie ? How can you leave your father and mother ? I do

not ask how you could leave me, without a word of warning."

"I intended to write," replied Maggie; "it has been on my mind many months. I could do much more for my parents by earning a livelihood, and sending remittances home, than by staying here; my father is often in want of a little ready money; I shall not spend more than twenty pounds a year, and I am to have sixty, with all my expenses paid."

"And why not stay here? There are plenty of situations in Edinburgh."

"But not paid at that rate, for young children."

"Why should you plague yourself teaching a heap of nasty, dirty, little brats," said Donald, angrily.

"Because, in the first place, I don't think them 'nasty, dirty, little brats;' they seem nice children, and their parents all one could desire."

"It's no matter what they are, or what they seem, you are not going, Maggie."

"No one has a right to stop me, except my parents, Donald, and they have given their consent."

"Not willingly; you should have seen your mother when I came in; it is very hard upon them; do you forget that?"

"I have asked a cousin, Jeanie Morison, to take my place, she is well enough off not to ask wages, and wants a home; both her father and mother are dead, but for that, I should not have thought of going; it seemed to open my way."

"And how did you find the place?"

"I asked Miss Honey Vinegar to look out for one for me; she highly approves the step, she even said it was a very prudent thing to get out of a certain person's way. I knew she would tell your mother, Donald; and take care to keep it from you. I had hoped to be off before you knew anything about it."

Maggie spoke calmly, but her hand trembled.

"This accounts for my mother's good spirits," Donald said; "I have observed a change the last few days. What ship do you go by, Maggie?"

"I will not tell you," Maggie replied, instinctively guessing what were his thoughts, from his receiving the news so quietly. "Donald, everything must be at an end between us; do not give up home, and friends, and future prospects, for a mere fancy."

"It is not a fancy, you know better, Maggie," he said, hoarsely.

"Then it will last till I come back," she said, cheerfully; "you will then have entered on your professional career, and I shall find you a successful advocate."

"How long is my probation to last?"

"Four years; by that time you may have seen another more suited to your fortunes

than Maggie Græme. Your sister, dear, and sweet, and good, as she is, will not regret my going. I have eyes to see, and a heart to feel, Donald Ramsay. I am not your equal, there is no comfort in unequal marriages. I have learned all I know from you, without your teaching I could not have done this; it is my gratitude, dear friend, that impels me to this step."

"It is not, Maggie," Donald answered, fiercely; "gratitude would make you stick by me, be my safeguard, as you have been always—"

"Not entirely," she interrupted; "I was the cause of your last—"

"Brutal outbreak; say the honest truth, Maggie; give it its real name. I know you despise, and reject me. I am not firm, and wise, and cold, like you. You don't think what I may become away from you. No comfort for the present, no hope for the future."

"I cannot help you, dear," she said, laying her hand upon his shoulder ; " only God can do that. You refuse the next best safeguard, I have so often urged upon you. I cannot help you, though I would give my heart's blood to do it," she put her other hand over her eyes, and a great sob burst from her.

"I will sign anything, if you will but stay, Maggie," Donald answered, with passionate earnestness ; " I will never touch another drop of any strong drink, if you will renounce this miserable plan."

"That is impossible, now," she said quietly, but in a manner Donald knew meant, it was vain to argue the point further ; " four years will soon pass, and then if you still persist in asking me to be your wife, if you can show you have conquered, and that a fatal habit has not got the better of you, I will refuse no longer ; but, Donald, until I can feel sure of that, I cannot face the awful uncer-

tainty of marrying a man whom I do not trust."

" You have no love for me, Maggie ; if it were in your nature, you might feel as much for me as for anybody ; but it is not in you ; God made you to inspire love, and not feel it, fair, but cold."

It was well, perhaps, she could see him, better than he could see her, or the flash of her eyes, the sudden rush of blood to the young face, the thrill through her heart might have made him recall the words ; as it was, she answered—

" Perhaps I am ; another in my walk of life might have registered your vows in perfect security ; and believed the happiness of being your wife would make up for future lapses ; I am content to be thought unfeeling," her manner was quite enough to carry conviction with it ; Donald felt he was beating the hard rock.

" Your coldness is maddening, Maggie," he

said at last, "you are like the rock that will none of the shipwrecked mariner; he may sink or drown; you do not care in your proud superiority." She turned to the fire for a moment, he saw tears glistening in her eyes, streaming down her cheeks; a sudden wild hope came over him; clasping her in his arms, he said, "Oh! Maggie, Maggie, do not go;" he felt the beating of her heart, and sobs were bursting forth in a torrent of uncontrollable grief, that would no longer be kept within bounds; "save me from myself, for you only can do it."

"No, no, Donald, it is for that reason I go, I want you to find the true way of strength, and power, and will, and no longer to depend on poor mortals like yourself and myself. Think of the joy it will be to meet when you are no longer the slave of impulse, the creature of a miserable habit. It must be, Donald, my very love to you pleads for me to go, and compel you to learn strength

by dependence not on man, but on God. I shall live to see it, dearest, though to enjoy may be another's lot."

"Never," replied he, setting his teeth, and clenching his raised right hand; "Maggie, I vow never to transgress again. I will be worthy of you, and none other but you shall be my wife. Will not this move you to stay?"

"Will it not move you to sign, as I have so often asked you before? I should go so much easier in mind, if you would please me in that one simple thing."

"It is all nonsense, Maggie; no pledge, or vow, however sacred, would have half the power with me, that the hope of claiming you has now. You will write to me, I see it is useless to ask you to change your mind. I will send you all I write, and you must criticize as you have done. Will you promise?"

"The promises must be all my side," she

said with a sad smile ; “ men like to bind us, but they will suffer no bond themselves. I must write if I wish to hear of you ; but even that would be better left.”

“ Simple folly and cruelty that would be, Maggie ; four years of banishment are surely punishment enough for my sins, though they are many and great. Oh ! severe judge, remember—

‘The quality of mercy is not strained,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven ;
And earthly power doth then show likest God’s,
When mercy seasons justice.’

I must plead in a woman’s words to you Maggie.”

“ But Portia is a man’s creation.”

“ So she is, that accounts for her having a soft spot in her heart, somewhere.”

Donald was brightening up, the impression of the new state of things was growing in his imagination, and taking a less gloomy aspect, from his easily excited mind ; was she right after all in leaving ? For a moment, a pang

shot through her heart, lest her sacrifice should not be needed.

“ I must study with heart and soul this session,” he went on ; “ Harry Carmichael says he shall travel, but if he stays here, I shall have little or nothing to do with him. He is a cad, a low, conceited snob.”

“ For once I heartily agree with you,” Maggie said, though she forebore to give her exact reasons ; “ he is beneath a common snob, for he is vicious, as well as idle, and mean, with all his extravagance. You must often mention your sister, Donald ; I could love her right warmly as mine too.”

“ And she likes you, Maggie ; poor Edith ! ”

“ Why do you pity her ? ”

“ Don’t you know she has broken with Montague Dewar ? I did not tell you. It was partly my fault ; I have been sorry since that I did not leave well alone.”

“ I thought he looked very ill when I met

him yesterday ; can't you bring matters round again, Donald ? ”

“ There seems to be some doubt about his birth ; no one can say anything for certain, but you know girls must not marry without some knowledge of their lover's position and parentage.”

“ That weighs more than character, it seems,” replied Maggie ; “ girls of our class, are expected to marry men of yours without any demur.”

“ That is a hit at me, Maggie ; yet I think there is some difference. I, at least, am known to be a gentleman.”

“ Isn't he one also, in mind and conduct at any rate, is not that enough ? ”

“ Oh ! Maggie, you are so unlike the world ; I don't know how you will ever manage to battle through it ; wee Maggie, with all her old-fashioned, obstinate belief in all that is good ! ” He kissed her tenderly ; there was a certain sense of protection in his whole-

hearted affection, and superior knowledge of the world ; he had no idea of his own total want of moral strength.

“ Now you must go, Donald,” gently pushing him from her ; “ but for the fact that your mother might be uneasy, you should not turn out on such a night ; the old room should give you shelter, as it did six years ago. Oh ! how much has happened since then !—Now go, farewell, and God be with you.” He held her in a long embrace, and then turned out into the darkness, and the cold ; much like what life would be to him without Maggie. More and more did the sense of coming desolation oppress him, as he stumbled on in the murky night ; he walked rapidly home ; and no power on earth could have tempted him into the glittering hotels and clubs ; but his mind was fully made up before he reached his mother’s threshold.

When Edith came down next morning, she found a letter on her plate at breakfast, in Donald’s handwriting.

“Dear Edith,” it ran, “will you tell my mother particular business calls me to Plymouth, which may detain me for days, weeks, or years, perhaps my whole life. I will let her know for certain before long, she quite understands, and will be able to explain this unexpected move, on the part of your extraordinary brother,—DONALD RAMSAY.”

Mrs. Ramsay entered the room as Edith finished the letter. She read it aloud, and asked, “What does it mean?”

“Mean!” exclaimed her mother, with a face of the utmost alarm; “that he is off to Australia with Maggie Græme; Edith, as you love me, or Donald, go after him, and stop this mad freak; go by the next train.”

“But mother, I must have some one with me.”

“Take Nannie, anyone, only do not linger. I will go,” but she sank (in a state of nervous trembling) back in her chair, that showed how unfit she was for such an effort. “Take Nannie, I command you, Edith.”

Her daughter rang the bell. To consult Bradshaw, and bid Nannie come, was the work of a few seconds. When the old servant appeared, Edith bade her prepare for a journey to England, in an hour and a half.

“And what’s tae become o’ mistress Ramsay, while I’m awa’ Miss Edith?” said she, planting her hands resolutely at the back of the chair; “an ye daurna gang alane after Maisther Donald, ye wad dae maist as weel, an ye let him hae his fling, an’ follow the lassie, an he will do’t.”

“It will kill me Nannie, to have Donald throw up his fine prospects for the sake of a foolish girl,” said Mrs. Ramsay; “and I will not have Miss Edith go alone, on such a journey.”

“Gin ye no’ kill yersel’ while I’m awa’ it’ll be a wonder,” said Nannie; with the freedom allowed by her mistress to no other person, “wi’ the rage, and the misery, an’ what’s sure to come next.”

Nannie flounced out of the room, and Edith reflected whether it would be better to go to Lady Carshalton, but the trains would be lost, and the ship might have set sail in consequence.

How Montague Dewar would have helped at such a moment by going in her stead! who so likely to have executed the difficult commission well? Uncle Aleck would never do, he was too old to send on such an errand; hurry, and fears and annoyance would upset him completely. Besides, if Donald could be got back without his knowing it, it would be better. This escapade, following so quickly on his late outbreak, was more than he could be expected to tolerate.

"We will call on Miss Honey Vinegar, and ask her to come to mamma until we return, Nannie," said Edith, with sudden inspiration.

"She'll no' come, gin it be to mak' hersel' o' any use," replied Nannie; and so it turned out. Miss Honey excused herself by

saying she had the proofs to correct of a paper on "The Heresies of the Early Christian Church," in which she had clearly proved the differences between the Essenes and the Donatists. She was very sorry; at any other time, nothing would have given her greater pleasure than to have gone to dear Mrs. Ramsay, with much more in the same style, until Edith, heartily disgusted, asked for a sheet of paper, and scribbled off a hasty note to Carshalton House, begging her Aunt and Lucy, if possible, to go to the Priory until her return. A messenger despatched with this, assured Edith that some one would be with her mother before night. This settled, Edith felt relieved when they were whirling south over the borders. Nannie's face gave her scant comfort. The faithful old body had never left her mistress for a single night for upwards of seventeen years, and in her concern about her, Donald's welfare faded into comparative insignificance.

“I’m no’ sae sure ye hadna dune better to let the daft callant gang his ain gate ; it would be better than we careering over the countree (the mistress left alane an’ a’), with the chance o’ seein’ the ship sailin’ frae sight, just as we come nigh Plymouth. I’m no’ for sic desperate rinnins frae ane end o’ the world till the tither.”

It was not until they reached Carlisle, that either remembered Willie. He always breakfasted early, and was generally off to business a full hour before any one else came down.

“Ah ! well, Nannie,” Edith said, after a fresh grumble ; “you won’t mind if we get Donald safe back again ; no one would miss him more than you.”

CHAPTER IV.

"We often do a bad act, and make a worse excuse."

As usual, when people are in a hurry, a great many things seemed to go wrong; there was an unimportant accident on the line, which, trifling in itself, delayed the journey to London, and caused them to miss both the night express and the early morning trains to Plymouth. Consequently, the next day was far spent when they arrived there.

On the journey, Edith remembered she knew nothing about the ship, beyond its destination—that a wide one, Australia; its name, or the line it belonged to, were a mystery. To her dismay, on enquiring at the hotel, she found that there were three lying in the roads. The shortest way would be to take a boat, and visit each one in succession. That was miserable work; a thick

fog shrouded the Hough and Mount Edgecombe; the damp wind chilled them to the bone.

To their enquiries on board the first ship, they received the answer that there were no passengers on board answering to the names of Græme and Ramsay; the same fate awaited them on board the second—both were only waiting for the arrival of letters and the captain, to set sail. The idea of Donald's having secured a passage under a feigned name, now occurred to Edith, and made her more uncertain than before. When the like discouraging answer was given to their enquiries on board the third vessel, she became convinced such was the case.

“Are you certain there is no young lady on board?” she asked, in despair.

“Perhaps that is the name of the governess with Captain Woodward,” suggested a midddy; “I think I heard them call her Græme.”

“Will you come up?” said the superior officer, impressed by the anxiety on Edith’s face, and ready, like all sailors, to be touched by a woman’s distress; “I will make enquiry. Would you rather stay where you are?” he said to Nannie, whose face of abject terror at the behaviour of the boat was only surpassed by the horror of having to ascend up the side of the vessel in the tub lowered for them, dangling at the end of a single rope, and by which Edith was safely landed on deck.

“Oh! ay! I dinna ken hoo ye can expect a body to trust theresel’ in sic a concern,” she said, fairly ready to cry, steadying herself with desperate earnestness of purpose by her two hands on the sides of what seemed more of a cockleshell than ever as it was being bumped alongside a large vessel. With a feeble cry, at the drag of each succeeding wave, she said piteously to her young mistress—

“ Be quick, Miss Edith, an ye no wish to find me deed o’ fright, before ye come back.”

In the midst of her anxiety, Edith could scarcely forbear laughing at the expression of Nannie’s face, it was a picture of such absolute misery ; but leaving her to the comforting assurances of the middy, that “ there wasn’t enough sea on to upset a walnut shell,” she followed the second officer into the cabin.

What a scene of confusion it looked ; everybody calling for lost packages, and children tumbling over each other, and against everything else in turn. As one of the youngsters fell with a heavy thud against the sides of the sleeping berths, an outcry brought two heads from an adjoining door. One of these belonged to Maggie Græme. Edith was standing, waiting while the list of passengers’ names was being searched, and Maggie did not see her. Catching the boy up in her arms, she soothed and petted him, with such

brilliant success, that his face was soon bright with smiles.

"You are a darling, Ivan," Maggie said, hugging him.

"Aren't I?" the little fellow said, naïvely ;
"I no ky long."

"No, you are a brave little man; you shall take care of mamma and me all the way to Australia."

Ivan laughed loudly at the idea; not till then did Maggie look up, and find Edith and the second officer watching her—both interested spectators.

"How came you here, dear Miss Edith?" said Maggie, starting; "Donald!" was her second exclamation.

"Yes, Maggie, he left a note for me; he is here, somewhere, in the ship. Have you not seen him?"

"No. He must not come," she said, the colour mounting up to her cheeks.

"Are you expecting any one?" the officer

asked, looking doubtfully from one to the other.

"Yes; No," came from both simultaneously.

"Have you seen a tall young gentleman on board, with brown curly hair and blue eyes?" Maggie asked; "very good-looking," she added, with a blush, but with business-like emphasis.

"A young fellow, answering to that description, took his berth in the second cabin last night."

"Was his name Ramsay?"

"No," said the first officer, turning over a leaf; "he gave the name of Seton."

"It is he—it is his second name!" exclaimed Edith. "Is he on board now?"

"I rather think I saw him go ashore early, but he would be back by this time. I will go and see. If you do not care for him to know you are here, you had better remain where you are till I find him. I will be here in two minutes."

They seemed ten to the two anxious girls.

"I hoped my going away would put an end to all trouble," Maggie said, sadly; "this seems like increasing it."

"It was on Donald's account, then, you left home, Maggie?" Edith said, looking affectionately into her honest eyes.

"Yes; I thought it better for us both to be too far apart to meet. I have tried all I could to lead him right, but—" tears finished up the sentence more eloquently than words. Edith gave her a long loving kiss.

"God bless you, Maggie, and grant that your unselfish kindness may not be in vain. We cannot tell what the future may bring, but if it see you Donald's wife after such a proof of sincerity of purpose on your part, I shall be proud to call you my sister."

Here the second head which had been popped out when Ivan hurt himself, now came forward on a remarkably fine person, who looked somewhat surprised at seeing her

little governess the object of a warm embrace from a visitor of such unmistakable distinction of mien and manner as Edith, all the more conspicuous from the confusion around her. Maggie introduced them as Mrs. Woodward—Miss Ramsay, and the lady was preparing to take part in the conversation, little as she was wanted, when the second officer returned.

“There is no time to be lost, he is on board, but I see the captain’s boat putting off. This way.”

Maggie looked rather than asked permission from her employer, and she followed with Edith along the close quarters of the lower deck, assigned to the poorer passengers. At the farther end their conductor opened a door, and in a stifling little hole, they perceived Donald. He was dressed in coarse workman’s clothes, but they became him as well as his own ; he was endeavouring to catch a glimpse of the shore, as the porthole rose out

of the water, when the door opened, and made him turn round. He confronted both with a look of blank astonishment.

“What brought you here, Edith?”

“I think it is my right to ask that question, Donald. Will you never leave us a moment’s peace?”

“I had perhaps better have drowned myself at once,” he spoke bitterly.

“Donald, is this your promise to me, two nights ago?” Maggie said sorrowfully: “Oh! I am indeed unhappy!” she sank on the bare wooden locker, and wrung her hands with grief and vexation. Donald relented.

“Maggie, I thought when we were once in Australia you would not refuse me. I am strong, I can do a day’s work with any man, and there are no class distinctions over there.”

“But there is the vast division of good and bad, Donald,” she said, rousing herself, and confronting him with flashing eyes; “the dis-

obedient son, the reckless man, throwing away the time and talents God has given him, the selfish unstable friend, can only belong to one, and that the worst. Should I take you more willingly, with all those follies committed beyond redemption in a land where I could claim no refuge from you, and you would feel only idle repentance at having left your home, and the plain path of duty?"

It was cogent reasoning, and Donald could not answer ; a knock at the door broke the silence. It was the second officer.

"If you are returning ashore, madam, it is time to go."

Edith looked up pleadingly at her brother. Maggie, it was, who, opening the locker, took out the bundle she guessed belonged to him, put her arm within his, and led him slow, but unresisting, out of the stuffy second deck into the fresh air above. People stared at the strange group, the splendid youth in workman's clothes, the elegantly dressed woman

at his side, and the eager face of the girl who led him.

Such scenes are not unfrequent on board ship at the moment of its departure. Without uttering a word, Donald stood a picture of blank dismay. He saw Edith and Maggie folded once more in a warm embrace, heard Edith commend her to Mrs. Woodward's care and tenderness ; knew that the ship captain was looking on with the curious look that said, he had become acquainted with all sides of human nature ; felt Maggie wring his hand with a few words of loving, fervent blessing. Then the second officer pushed him gently to the bulwark, not till he was in the boat, unconscious of old Nannie's presence, did he seem to wake up ; they were pushing off ; Maggie was waving from the ship. With a cry he stretched out his arms to her, and then seemed to sink together, like a nerveless, broken man.

“ I'm no' sae sure ye wadna hae dune better

to let him gang," murmured Nannie once more, as she looked with her old eyes full of tears at the head bent on his hands.

"How very odd! what can it all mean?" was Mrs. Woodward's question to her husband, as Maggie staggered and would have fallen, had not the second officer caught her and guided her gently down to the cabin. As he left her weeping there, his honest heart found expression in the words, "Heaven help 'em both, poor souls! I don't care if I never see another parting like that."

"There is the stuff for a heroine in Miss Græme," was Captain Woodward's reply to his wife, "and sorrow enough in the whole transaction, I fancy, to work out a five act tragedy."

"Indeed! I am very thankful we are not more nearly concerned in it," was the lady's reply, "governesses think quite too much of themselves now so many novels are written about them."

The journey home was far from comfortable for Edith. Donald behaved like an injured person, and spoke little ; if he did, it was irritably and curtly. Edith felt grateful to see Lucy Carshalton's bright face at the Priory door, and to meet her aunt's glance of tender sympathy.

"I am so glad you are home safe, and Donald with you," she said, as she removed Edith's wrap in the hall, and preceded her into the drawing-room. "It is well you sent for us, for your mother had some attack soon after we arrived, a sort of fit. Don't be alarmed," she added, as Edith grew pale, "I sent for Dr. Forrest, who said, to my surprise, it was not the first time she had had one, and that they were not dangerous at present, though probably they would shorten her life in the end. I thought it best to tell you, darling ; such things are heartrending when they come upon us unprepared. She ought not to be worried ; I must tell Donald."

"I wish you would," replied Edith, "it might have more effect upon him than anything I could say."

Edith was glad to turn the conversation to the subject of her journey and its result.

Christmas came and went. Harry Carmichael set off on his travels, which he gave out would last three years ; he meant to do the thing thoroughly when he was abroad ; and not always be fidgetting backwards and forwards like the generality of people.

Montague Dewar carried more than one difficult case triumphantly through the law courts. He was the most popular advocate in Edinburgh. People spoke of his terse eloquence and close reasoning. Edith heard him more than once being made the subject of discussion near her, and was aware of the conversation ceasing as soon as the speakers became conscious of her presence. Speculation was rife, and bewonderment rampant, when it became known she had declined more

than one good offer of marriage. Some accused her of ambition, others of being a flirt ; all thought her conduct unaccountable, to say the least of it. Once or twice Montague Dewar and Edith met, not oftener, for those who knew of their previous engagement, forbore to ask them on the same evening. His hair was more than iron-grey now, in places it showed large streaks of white, but it seemed to make his fine eyes and eyebrows, and his clear-cut features only more remarkable. His was generally declared the most striking figure in the room ; the ladies, especially the elder intellectual ones, said he was something better than handsome, he was *spirituel*. Edith wore her chain of secret sorrow in calm acceptance of its galling pressure, not by one word did either allude to the past. She would willingly have eschewed society, and its weary round of sameness ; but Mrs. Ramsay seemed to find more solace than ever in its monotonous excitement. Night after night

found them occupied in busy idleness ; day after day claimed its hours for calls and concerts. Edith's heart sickened at the reiteration of fatiguing change from one gaiety to another. For some time after his return, Donald never went with them, later he appeared occasionally ; as the season closed, oftener. He shone, his conversation was considered brilliant, and he seemed to relish his cousin Lucy's companionship ; he seldom went where she was not expected ; it was one of his openly avowed convictions that cousins ought not to marry, to that Lady Carshalton trusted her daughter's future happiness. Willie showed an equal predilection for Nellie Carnegie. The evenings he was sure of not meeting her, were passed in seclusion in his own room, where once, as Edith was going downstairs to the carriage, and his door happened to be open, she saw a vision of reams of paper ; not a trace of them existed during his absence. Once she found a spirited sketch

dropped outside in the passage, it looked as if intended for an illustration to a story in a magazine, but he vouchsafed no explanation when she returned it to him. He was even tempered, but reserved, no one knew what was passing in his mind, or what he did with himself out of office hours, unless Mrs. Carnegie and Nellie were in his confidence ; if so, they kept his secret well. The sympathy between them was too patent to escape observation, and Mrs. Ramsay was congratulated on her eldest son's prospects. She confessed the public knew more than she did, but the Carnegies were unexceptionable people, and if the mother were content with Willie for a son-in-law, she had no objection to Nellie, with her prospective *tocher* from Mr. McCorquedaille. "She has no style whatever," was always her conclusion, "but neither has Willie, so they will be well matched." To Miss Honey Vinegar she confided the fact

that it was a far better marriage, if it ever arrived at the matrimonial stage, than she ever looked forward to for Willie. Poor fellow!

CHAPTER V.

"If there be joy in the world, surely a man of pure heart possesseth it."

AND how fares Maggie in her home beyond the equator? Perhaps it would be best to let her tell her own experiences. A short letter arrived about three weeks after she started, sent by a homeward bound vessel; this Donald did not show to Edith. A second, written after her arrival in Australia, they both read; it ran thus:—

"Rotonga, Melbourne.

"DEAR DONALD,—

"Fancy my joy on going to the post-office in Melbourne, this morning, at finding two letters—one from father and one from you. I wish English people could see the excitement that prevails here on the arrival of a ship from the old country, nothing that I have seen yet proves so

strongly the tie that binds them together. There are different flags hoisted, which announce when she is first sighted, when she anchors in Hobson's Bay, when the letters are brought on shore, and the fourth gives the joyful news of their being sorted. The post-office is a noble building, standing on the top of a magnificent flight of steps. The people are so hungry for news of home that they cannot abstain from tearing open envelopes until they reach the street; after nearly tumbling headlong in their absorption, they finally sit down to finish them. As it seems never to rain here—at least it has been all hot wind, sun, and dust, since we arrived, though we are promised showers in plenty before long—the most rheumatic people may sit down anywhere, and on anything. I followed my neighbours' example, and read my two letters on the stairs. I was truly thankful for yours; it made my heart glad and my spirits light as this glorious

atmosphere, for with all the drawbacks above-mentioned, it is delicious. Father and mother are happy with Jeanie; 'she is aye douce and canny in her ways,' they say. But now I must tell you about our voyage; the retrospect seems much pleasanter than the reality; agreeable things remain in the memory, and the disagreeables seem to have faded. We were all ill, of course. Mrs. Woodward for three weeks, I for as many days; at the end of them, I think I should have died but for Mr. Foster, the young second officer; he came and suggested my getting on deck, where he rigged up (I am growing nautical in my expressions already, you see) the best substitute possible for a sofa, out of the chairs, and I lay on deck all day. Captain Woodward took care of the children, even washing and dressing them—both nurse and I being of no use till the sea sickness was over—besides which he attended to his wife; there was no female attendant on

board. Next day was rough, but a splendid sea on. I felt worse than ever; again Mr. Foster insisted on my going on deck, although I had to be tied to the fixed benches, and have a tarpaulin made fast over me to keep me dry under the occasional bursts of spray. In this way, I had full opportunity of watching the behaviour of a rough sea. A great green wave would rise at the stern of the vessel, seeming ready to swallow it up; then came a heave, and a drag, a sinking, and creaking, and looking towards the forecastle, I saw it hurrying on, as if eager to try whether it could not meet better luck with some ship beyond; so it went on, all day, until dinner time at four. Mr. Foster fed me with biscuits from time to time, and Captain Woodward offered me champagne, but I refused it. Mr. Foster said I was right; it did not really do sea sickness any good. I fancy he is a total abstainer, but the Captain goes very far on the other tack; he was

scarcely sober one day out of the twenty-one since we started, and most of the cuddy passengers followed his example, except Captain Woodward and a few others. They seemed, in fact, to do nothing else but drink. One night, and this is a fact, for Captain Woodward was present—it was the anniversary of the doctor's wedding day—we had a dance on deck, and after the ladies retired, he supplied the watch with drink until every one was intoxicated, even to the man at the wheel, and we were going round and round, and just any where; fortunately it was in mid ocean, far from rocks, and where other ships could give us a wide berth, the watch was just ended, a sober set came up, and Captain Woodward saw the doctor into his berth, and snoring soundly, before he retreated to his own cabin. It was Mr. Foster's watch, moreover, so it was of course safe."

"Devil take Mr. Foster," said Donald,

impatiently ; “ I suspect he made deliberate love to her all the way out.”

“ We acted a play in the tropics ; I was Lady Teazle, and one of the passengers my uninteresting little husband. A quiet little English girl, a Miss Nutall, took the part of Sairy Gamp, in a *tableau* afterwards. She is going out to be married to a clergyman of the Church of England. What a horrid way it is, being sent out in that fashion ; suppose your husband did not want you when you arrived. Could anything be more wretched ? She does not seem to me to be looking forward with much pleasure to the meeting—indeed, I believe she would throw him up for Mr. Foster ; being alone he has shown her a great deal of kindness, but he manages to do what he can for every body. I never saw such genuine, I was going to say *feminine* goodness and tenderness—it sounds conceited—as sailors show, especially to women and children, and I suspect it is the same with

men when needed. The tropical evenings after the sun went down were delicious, the sails looked like ghosts, towering up in the twilight to the big beautiful stars; but I have seen no sunsets equal to those at home, and the Southern Cross cannot hold a candle to our glorious northern constellations. But, then, we have no soot-bag, as they call a bit of absolutely empty space in the southern hemisphere, and which is plainly discernable in the surrounding atmosphere. Events were few and far between, in the ninety-six days' passage; after speaking the ship by which I sent my first letter, we saw no others, except once or twice in the extreme distance, from the time we left the Azores till we anchored in Hobson's Bay. We saw one whale, one flying fish, and one Portuguese man-of-war; killed one beautiful albatross, a lovely creature. It seemed such a shame to see it dragged ignominiously through the water, tugged up on deck, and then

slaughtered. The man's cabin who captured it was a den of abomination for a week, at least, until the whole thing was disposed of. I might have had skin for a muff, stems for pipes, a purse made out of a foot, and no end of similar offerings, but I declined them all, and left them for the other ladies to enjoy and utilise. Besides the albatross, two sweet little Mother Carey's chickens were foully murdered by a thoughtless youth, and that angered the crew, and made them predict a storm—it did not come; they tell me it is a singularly peaceful voyage, as a rule; what misfortunes happen arise mostly from drunkenness, or on the return voyage, from icebergs near Cape Horn. We lay-to beside the island of Trinidad, in a dead calm; some of us wanted to go on shore, but the captain was cross, and threatened to leave us if a breeze sprang up. The rocks, covered with bright coloured lichens, looked very tempting, and it is a rule to stop in case there

should be shipwrecked sailors awaiting a rescue. The cow slung in the long boat scented the land long before we saw it, and lowed piteously. I think the fact of her giving milk, in such a state of confinement, the greatest proof of Christian principle possible. Ivan and I often paid her a visit under Mr. Foster's guidance.

"The tropics were certainly the most enjoyable part of the voyage. The heat is great, but the weather generally calm enough to admit of open port holes, and life on deck under an awning. Slightly heeled over to one side, the ship glides steadily on before the breeze, without any rolling. We were fortunate in not being becalmed—caught in the doldrums, as sailors say—for more than one day. This kept the captain good tempered, as quick voyages are of such importance to them, that anything like a calm drives them half distracted. The middies, poor lads, have a horrible life of it—in some

lines they are not allowed to r
cuddy passengers ; not that, as
would be much disadvantage to
got up a concert, as well as a pl
rehearsals were held in their cab
able hole, where six of them s
their chests. It seemed to me
every way ; the atmosphere wa
do not wonder they soon tire
and that when practicable most
it for another. Some were clerg
one even hailed from a midland
which his father was member ; I
in the examination for the navy.
youngest, he had to return the
ladies, on Christmas Day ; but
shy to utter a word—he is rather
Appearing one day on the comp
way, in a pair of boots nearl
waist, a passenger remarked
boots.’ The little fellow turned
an expression of ineffable scorn

‘That is an observation no gentleman would condescend to notice.’

“Ivan was the pet of the ship—but oh! the trial of children in a high wind! they seem ready to fly over the bulwarks every minute, and get hurled about the decks like twopenny rolls. I can see Ivan deliberately sliding down a wet deck, and received into a coil of ropes, just filled with salt water—a sitz bath gratis. Children seldom get hurt, and are far less ridiculous than grown up people, whose movements are awkward and angular, and whose faces of abject terror are ludicrous in the extreme;—one poor drunken artillery officer, who has been shipped away from England by his friends, never could be induced to stir on a rough day.

“‘I wasn’t born a pigeon,’ he said, ‘to walk on slanting roofs.’

“Mr. Foster gave me a hint to wear goloshes, and I did not get a single fall in consequence. They bite on wet wood as nothing else does.

“ We did not escape the sad experience of a death on board. A respectable merchant, the father of six small children, who had seen better days, died after a week's illness ; he was a Mr. Simmons. An Italian, one of the crew, who always went by the name of Johnnie, rigged up a little tent for him on deck, to give the poor sufferer more air than he could have in the second cabins, where the port-holes are often shut for three weeks at a time. There his pretty young wife watched him, Johnnie relieving her when off duty, or helping with the children, until the end came. Mrs. Woodward allowed me to take her to my cool, airy cabin for the day. He died at seven in the morning, and was buried in the afternoon. The captain told me at what hour the body would be launched into its wide resting-place, and I was reading the beautiful English burial service to her, when in the midst we heard the splash of the falling body — the shudder that passed

through the desolate wife was sad to see. Then followed a flood of tears—the first she had shed.

“Much kindness was shown both to the children and her. They were all put into mourning, by black garments contributed by the passengers. While she rested in my cabin, the children were well cared for. Johnnie continued their great benefactor; he had the finest sense of delicate kindness I ever heard of. The golden-haired young mother realized his artistic ideas of a Madonna—he seemed from the first almost ready to give his life for her. I believe he had promised to see after them on landing at Melbourne, and as he knew the place well, would be invaluable to them. His brown eyes were a study of gentleness and sweet temper. Yet, in a storm, he was always among the first to volunteer for the most dangerous duty.

“There was some history attached to him.

He had joined the party of Italian patriots, and could not return to his own country. A few years may set that all right, and poor Johnnie get back to his beloved Italy once more.

“The next land we sighted was Tristan D’Acuhna—a long, long way off; but I saw snow-mountains for the first time. They lay glistening like silver under an unclouded sky.

“I am very fond of dear little Ivan; he is a sweet boy. The three girls will require some judicious management; Mrs. Woodward spoils them all dreadfully. She lost two babies before Ivan, and that makes her foolishly fond of those left.”

“She is beginning to see where the shoe pinches already,” remarked Donald; “I foresee breezes with Mrs. Woodward.”

“When we reached Hobson’s Bay, Captain Woodward landed, engaged rooms at a hotel, and fetched us next morning. What a bustle

it was. I watched the *adieux* between Miss Nutall and Mr. Foster. She burst into tears, and said openly she dreaded meeting her affianced. He tried to comfort her by saying all would come right; but I think if he had suggested her going back with the ship again as Mrs. Foster, she would have accepted the proposal. Unfortunately, he made it to me instead, the evening before we left the ship. I was greatly distressed, and the consequence was, I had no opportunity of thanking him for all his kindness, which had been more like that of a brother, and which I accepted in that light. I fancied he must have guessed how matters stood between you and me, when we parted, and never dreamed of anything further."

"Of course, just what might have been expected," said Donald, getting up and walking up and down the room, pushing an unoffending chair so violently that it tumbled over, "I haven't patience with the fellow!

he must have known it was a mean advantage to take of an unprotected girl."

Edith smiled unseen.

"Go on," she said, at last.

"The house taken by Captain Woodward, ready furnished, is, I am glad to say, some way out of Melbourne, in a hilly, well wooded part, beside a creek. I soon tired of the dusty streets, where over-dressed women were 'doing the block,' as they call promenading up and down a certain part of Collins street, and a side street. The better class of people must have been out of town—at any rate, I do not admire those left. They are loud in their talk and fast in their manners, wear huge brooches, almost as big as saucers, and call their husbands by their surnames.

"Mrs. Woodward, who was 'colonial' born, but who has lived in England some years, rather overdoes her hatred of them—like many who do not begin elegant refinement with their childhood. The house, unlike

most villas, has two stories—a blessing as far as the serpents are concerned ; it would be a trouble to them to wriggle upstairs, and give time for their being called upon to pay toll by the way. We have the Australian spring to look forward to. Mr. Mauleverer, who, by-the-bye, has duly converted Miss Nutall into Mrs. Mauleverer, and turns out, besides, to be the clergyman of the church we attend, says the flowers will be a delight. He seems a very clever man, and a gentleman *par excellence*. His sermons are most interesting. She is certainly not equal to him—I cannot think how they ever came to be affianced. Mrs. Woodward emphatically pronounced her ‘a common little thing’ before we had been three days on board ship; but I feel great sympathy for her, and foresee trouble, for he is caustic, and not apt to make allowances for weakness, either mental or bodily.

“There is a promise of great beauty in

the acacias, which do duty for hawthorn hedges here, and which are like gigantic yellow feathers, when in full bloom. The blue gums are ugly individually, but form almost our only foliage, and look well collectively at sunset, when their rugged stems glow like fire.

“Now I think I have told you enough for you to picture me in my far-off home. Next time, I will tell you how I fare with my teaching, and something of the people out here. I shall only see them at church, for Mrs. Woodward will associate with none but Government House and a few of the officials, and the military.

“There is one solitary old man, whom I have seen working in his garden, whom nobody knows anything about; but I have fallen in love with his face—it is sad, and yet noble, and I am sure tells a story. I intend to scrape up an acquaintance before long.

"Captain Woodward thinks of buying a pony for the girls and me to ride ; all ladies ought to ride here.

"Good-bye, dear friend ; mind your letter is as long and as egotistical as mine. My love to your dear sister ; take great care of her.

"Your true friend,

"MAGGIE."

"How brightly she writes, Donald," was Edith's comment, when he folded the letter, and put it back into his pocket-book.

"You do not blame me for loving her," he answered. "I see the misery that a clandestine engagement causes, but I do not repent for having given such a girl my honest admiration and respect. Love ought to know no artificial distinctions. The nobility of the soul is not bound up in the nobility of birth."

"Yet, if we all trod the advantages of

good birth and breeding under foot, we might as well sink into communism at once. Maggie's is an exceptional case; but I cannot credit all in her rank of life with her tact and fine discernment, though their principles of right and wrong may be as trustworthy."

"You are too much bound by social considerations, Edith; if women of all classes were only guided by the rule of right and wrong, it would simplify life immensely."

"I trust we are not wholly without the influence of your simple law," replied Edith; "even if the social requirements of our station do weigh somewhat heavily with us; noble women, who have no household duties, are not ashamed to work, and nurse, among the sick and poor, or on the battlefield, and plague-stricken villages at home. I think it a mistake to credit the middle and lower classes alone, with all the great virtues, though we may be wanting in some respects, our social advantages considered. Our plainest duty

after all, is to order our own ways aright, so as not to trench on the well-being of others ; no good can possibly arise from our making those unhappy with whom we come into immediate contact."

"You reason like all women, Edith, that is, you don't reason at all ; you think a good motive is all that is necessary to ensure good consequences ; it is the greatest mistake."

"It may seem so at times," answered his sister, a little sorrowfully ; "yet I have a secret conviction that conduct so regulated brings most happiness in the end ; apart from religious considerations, I cannot appreciate good that springs from evil motives."

"Because you are not omniscient. Maggie went away on your principle ; women love to make martyrs of themselves, forgetting how often they drag others into evil, who act from no such morbid craving for self-sacrifice."

Donald rose, and left the room with angry impatience.

CHAPTER VI.

“ Yet they wha fa' in fortune's strife,
Their fate we shouldna' censure,
For still the important end of life,
They equally may answer.”

THE next day a packet arrived by post. Donald on coming down late, found it on the breakfast table. It bore the address, “ Magnus, publisher.” As proofs often arrived in the same form, Edith thought nothing of it, and said—

“ Is it something else you have had accepted ? ”

“ No,” Donald answered, very quietly, reading a note enclosed ; “ it is manuscript returned. I am not much surprised. I wrote it when I was away with Harry Carmichael ; not exactly the society to write in, with a confounded riot constantly going on ; but I think Magnus might have decided a little quicker. Eh ! What does this mean ?

‘Can you not furnish us with a novel in your brother’s style? It is decidedly uncommon, and takes with our readers.’ Can it be the new serial? Well done old Will! I am glad! but what a sly fox he has been!”

Donald’s pleasure in his brother’s success was unfeigned; the sentences were jerked out at intervals, between mouthfuls of egg and bacon.

“I am afraid we have none of us done justice to Willie,” said Edith.

“He is such a queer fish,” returned Donald, “in spite of what Nellie Carnegie has done for him. I can’t comprehend a girl’s falling in love with him anyhow, yet with her prospects, she might have plenty of admirers; all poor devils except myself, are looking out for money now-a-days.”

At this moment Mrs. Ramsay re-entered the room.

“What would you say to one of your sons coming out a famous writer of fiction,

mother? Being patted on the back by Magnus, asked probably to favour them with all his productions, immense circulation of magazine, heaps of flattering reviews, competence, fame, all in the distance, then eventual dribbling, the usual lightning track of a man of genius? Eh, mother?"

"I have ceased to place my hopes on your success, Donald," Mrs. Ramsay replied sadly; "your thoughts and aims are too much divided."

"You may be right, mother," Donald answered, with a look and tone of mortification he could ill conceal; "but this prospect concerns Willie, not me."

"Willie!" ejaculated Mrs. Ramsay.

"Yes, read that."

"Thank God!" cried the mother, returning the letter; "one of my children may yet prove himself worthy of his race."

"The two others may serve to point the moral to some tale of woe, perhaps," put in

Donald, sarcastically; "you and I do not come up to our respected parent's *beau ideal*, Edith; for my part, I begin to think life a very hollow affair at its best, a misery at its second best, at its worst, a curse."

He went to the window, and his thoughts seemed, judging by his countenance, as bitter as his words. Then he left the room, this disappointment about the manuscript stung him more deeply than he cared others should see, especially his own people. He knew his brain had suffered from that month's excess. Strong tea, coffee, tonics, physic, everything that he had tried since Maggie's departure, failed to relieve the dull incapability of consecutive thought, the incapacity for continuous mental exertion, the leaden depression of spirits, which now rendered study in reality hard labour. Yet just at this time he needed to put forth all his powers; he wished to take his master of arts degree in April; he was quite aware that if he got through the final

examination at all, it must be in a manner savouring rather of disgrace, than honour, to one of his name and literary connections. It would be difficult to analyse his feelings as time went on ; at first the sense of being detected in a folly, of failing to carry his intention out, annoyed him ; he detested his own want of will, either to stay at home, and work like a man, whatever effort it cost him, and so recover his position in her eyes at least, or to assert his will as a free agent, and insist on going out to Australia still, if he choose. He was not of age, but would have nearly reached his majority, had his plan succeeded, before his guardians could have interfered. An irresistible loathing of daily reading came upon him, his thoughts wandered over imaginary plains of illimitable space, and freedom, where a life passed on horseback, in the air, seemed a paradise compared with dusty class rooms, and stuffy offices ; and Maggie's form was always

present in the picture. His longing for her, was only equalled by his want of steady will to work at deserving her. He felt angry with Edith for fetching him, dragging old Nannie into discomfort it cost her weeks to get over. He was angry now with his mother's renunciation of hope about him. He had become isolated even in his student life; the steadier hard working fellows avoided him, as a friend and boon companion of Harry Carmichael, and his set; these he now kept away from, for they were not able, or not inclined, to bribe him as Harry had done, with presents, which Donald had sunk low enough to accept. Now he felt it impossible to do without them. Expensive cigars, the dearest tobacco, were ordered and not paid for. In the intervals between his fits of study, a trip to Glasgow, or St. Andrew's, seemed a trifle, and if he had not the money, he no longer scrupled to ask Edith for it. She saw he was unsettled and

unhappy, and feared to irritate him by reproaching him with extravagance and self-indulgence, the change might do him good. Willie was more than ever wrapt up in his own special avocations, out early, and home late, almost every evening spent at the Carnegies' house, or in their company elsewhere, left him no time to think of his brother. In vain Donald turned again to literary work, his mind open only to subjective matter, in its morbid self-absorption, dwelt with painful reiteration on his peculiar form of trial, until it became apparent even to himself. The poems and essays were torn up as soon as written, often half finished. Prose work, translation, nothing succeeded ; he could no longer throw himself into the happy open air life of the ancient writers, their blue skies assumed the hues of the wet grey mist that shrouded his futile attempt at escape. The nymphs took Maggie's form but looked sad and tearful, and the shepherds

lived joyless lives, and held distorted views of earth, and things in general like himself, at that moment, in the cold spring of Edinburgh. He tried long walks, taken in the teeth of a north-east wind, and snow, but he came back chilled, and only more depressed and miserable. As he passed the hotels, he more than once debated with himself the question, whether a virtue which cost so much, was worth the candle? Uncle Aleck was not cordial, how could he be? This last escapade seemed such insane folly to his older ideas; and a common farmer's daughter, however superior she might be in her station of life, not worth the risk of setting a whole community by the ears, jabbering and prating over family concerns. Donald was a trial to all related to him; there was no doubt about that; he ought to be made to feel it. And Donald did! He had not gone on a visit to Craigstane for months. At one time a walk over the stubbles, and through the wet

turnips, with his uncle, after partridges, had been one of his greatest enjoyments, and a relief from the irksomeness of study, and town life. The racy humour of the old advocate, his tales of former times, and anecdotes of the people he had known, the things he had passed through, his experience of former practice, and his original thoughts and ways, were a grateful change. This enjoyment was now at an end, and the social evenings which followed also. Donald felt himself a sort of pariah, and consequently went through the world like a porcupine, ready to shoot out his quills at every trifling offence or slight. One cold, damp evening, late in February, he wandered out Corstorphine way. Old habit carried him nearer and nearer to the Græmes' farm. The milking was over, thrushes and blackbirds had not yet begun to tune up the first rich notes that herald the coming spring, the trees were black and bare, in the cutting raw easterly

wind. A few primrose leaves were rising above the grass, but bud and blossom were not thought of at present. Every foot of the farm recalled past years. Out of sight of prying eyes, he and Maggie had wandered to and fro in the fields and meadows, where the gentle cows looked after them, and spring after spring of joy, had ripened into summers of delight. Their talk had not been like ordinary lovers' nonsense. Constantly supplied with books which he was reading, or going to read, they were all enjoyed, and discussed in common ; entering even largely into his lighter studies, Maggie had grown into a rare companion, a sharer of his better thoughts, an unconscious leader, with her strong good sense, of his more imaginative temperament, a judicious pruner of his exaggerated contempt for the world and its ways. He had not been near the place since her departure ; now regardless of weather, he walked over the scene of his accident, of

the gamekeeper's chase after him, he jumped the very fences once more, but with only a tithe of his former activity and strength. He even wandered up to the cave; it was very difficult to get into it now, it had not been easy then, but he managed to sit down, and lean against the cold, damp rock. He was heated and excited by his exertions; the feverish eagerness of recollection had carried him almost to the limits of his strength. An hour or so passed in this desponding retrospection, and then he woke up from his reverie, with a shiver. Chilled to bone and marrow, his feet wet with roaming through long grass, and the boggy meadow to the cave, he found some trouble in working himself out of his constrained position, and then discovered he could scarcely move. He had been sitting on damp earth; only after continued effort was he able to regain the partial use of his limbs. If he could but reach the farm, he would get warmed and dried, and

then return home. After a time he succeeded in straightening his aching back, and restoring some feeling to his legs. He had avoided the house hitherto, now a strong yearning to see it again, and complete the circle of reminiscences, took possession of him. He unlatched the wicket, walked up the path, on either side of which he recognised the plants his now withered posie had been culled from, and without knocking at the door, opened it, and passed through the passage to the kitchen.

There was a blazing wood fire on the hearth, Farmer Græme sat on one side of it, with the great family Bible on his knee, a paraffin lamp burning on a small shelf beside him. Opposite, at a little table, sat his wife, knitting. Jeanie, the young niece, was standing at the big table, with a second lamp, cutting out some work. All three looked up as the door opened, and the farmer and his wife rose simultaneously. Donald had much more

the semblance of a ghost, in the gloom of the big bare room, than of a living being. There is a strong tinge of superstitious awe in every human soul.

“Gude save us ! is it yersel’, or yer wraith Maisther Donald ?” said the sturdy farmer, steadying himself on the arm of his chair.

“It’s all that’s left of me,” said Donald coming forward ; “may I sit down and get warm ? I feel very queer.”

“Ay, sit doon, puir fallow,” said Mrs. Græme, leading him to her own chair, and feeling his damp clothes ; “ye’re a’ o’ a shiver ! where hae ye bin ? What gar’d ye come oot here sic a nicht ?”

“Gie him a sup o’ warm parritch, Lizzie ; dinna stan’ claverin’,” said her husband, seeing Donald scarcely able to answer. While the good wife set the porridge on the fire, farmer Græme unlocked a cupboard, and brought out a black bottle.

“It’s only as a medicine, I tak’ the drink,

Maisther Donald ; but if ever ye needed ony, its yersel' at this moment ;" so saying, he poured out a small glass of whisky, and gave it to Donald. A strong shiver passed through his frame at the sight of the liquor ; he made a movement as if to push it away, then as he looked at it again, a sinister gleam gathered in his eyes, he stretched out his hand, and eagerly swallowed the dram. Warm, soft, delicious, it went down seeming a very cordial of life, and strength, reaching his vitals ; he began to feel better at once. The porridge ready, he ate with avidity, and then leaned back in his chair, a different man. The string of his tongue seemed loosed, the comfortable hearth, and the luxury of being with kindly people gave him fresh heart and courage. He looked at Jeanie's placid face, and said—

“ I am glad I came, I had a dread of finding you unhappy, without Maggie ; but this is a picture of tranquil content ; my heart feels more at rest.”

“ Weel a weel, we are maist used to the change noo, but it’s no’ canny wi’out our douce lassie, a’ things said,” replied the father.

“ It’s no’ that Jeanie is na douce, an’ o’ muckle use aboot the hoose, an’ i’ the byre, a’ways ; mair may be than Maggie was,” put in the mother.

“ Ay, ay,” said farmer Græme, patting the back of one hand with the fingers of the other ; “ but I wunna hae ’t thocht we no feel her absence, Maisther Donald. One’s flesh an’ bluid canna’ be supplied wi’ ither folks’ bairns, an’ i’ the gloamin’, my heart gaes nigh sometimes to fleein’ i’ the face o’ the Lord, and saying ‘ I canna’ bear it, I maun hae my ain lassie agen.’ I could maist greet like a child, an’ I didna’ hope it wad be better for Maggie i’ the end. She was ower clever, to be buried i’ the auld house wi’ us.”

“ And it’s all my fault,” said Donald, touched by the farmer’s face, in which strong

feeling was working, and by his trembling hand ; “ I wish I had never been born.”

“ Better think hoo ye sall mak’ the best o’ life, seein’ ye are born and canna’ alter it,” said the old fellow drily ; “ it’s ill greetin’ ower spilt milk. Ye hae a lang coorse o’ years still afore ye, an maun e’en fulfil the Lord’s will consarnin’ ye, an it be for guid or for evil. Why for sudna’ ye be a guid Christian man, an’ a credit to yer family yet, Maisther Donald ? I dinna’ speak for Maggie’s sake, she says she winna’ be your wife for ony askin’ ; but for yer ain sake Maisther Ramsay ; its time ye were up an’ doin’.”

“ I feel the truth of all you say, Mr. Græme,” replied Donald ; “ I am studying, but it is harder work with Maggie away. I had got used to having her here ; it’s years since I learned to depend on her advice, and judgment, about things ; Maggie is not the least like other girls.”

“ It’s true,” said the father ; “ she is nae

like ither lassies ; an' I maun say, it's you wha' hae to be thankit for 't. Ye hae sung the same tune o' luve for her a' the years ye've know her, an' it's no' yer fant she winna consent ; but the time's coom for a callant's dilly dallyin' to be ower an' dune for, an' for mon's wark to begin."

Mr. Græme's brows were contracting, and the wife knew sterner stuff lay ready to be converted into words.

" We'll no mak' the puir laddie wish he hadna' coom nigh the hoose," said she, with the indulgence of her sex for birth and position ; " he hae promised to be deeligent, an' his years are no' muckle yet, youth maun hae its fling."

Donald's pride in fact was rebelling against the father's reproof, he got up to go, and in spite of pressing, he refused to share in the supper Jeanie had prepared.

" Ye're no' angry wi' an auld man's plain spakin', Maisther Donald ?" said farmer

Græme, holding out his hand ; “ we hae paid for yer guid will to Maggie, by losin’ the licht o’ her bonny een, an’ the sound of her voice, which was like a laverock on the brae side, an’ it gives me a richt to speak till ye.”

“ A perfect right, I do not complain, Mr. Græme, everybody has a right to throw a stone at a fellow who is down.”

“ Why for suld ye be doon ? yons what I canna’ understand,” reiterated the farmer in blissful ignorance of what had not reached his ears, Donald’s unfortunate love of drink. He had never seen him otherwise than sober, and thought him clever enough to carry through everything he might undertake, as he had hitherto done. He did not comprehend Maggie’s persistent refusal to regard him as her future husband. He did not want Donald to marry his daughter, but with a father’s natural pride in one so superior, he thought her equal to him, and fit for any station. Why had he tried so much to educate, and

make her his companion, if that was not his aim? And the best way to accomplish it, was to get on in his profession, and begin to earn a livelihood, as he had not a fortune sufficient to live without it. Who could blame him for looking at the matter in this straightforward, business-like manner?

"I suppose I'm not well, and Maggie's absence makes me low spirited," said Donald in a feeble way, in answer to his last observation.

"Hout tout man," replied the farmer, "don't talk o' low speerits at yer age. Get oot o' yer bed, an' climb Arthur's Seat afore ye sit doon to yer breakfast i' the mornin', an' ye'll no complain o' low speerits! Come agen though, an' dinna be angry wi' an auld frien'," he concluded, as he once more shook Donald by the hand at the outer door, and closed it on him and the dark night, not so dark as the gloom in his soul.

"He's like every one else," muttered

Donald, as he stumbled on before the blast of the east wind. When he turned the corner to the high road, a small public house lay on his right; the blind was up, and the cosy room allured him; the taste of spirits had brought up the irresistible craving again, he could not stifle it. He entered, sat down in the chimney nook, and ordered a glass of hot brandy and water, then a second, he unloosed his warm comforter, and unbuttoned his coat, and when he left two hours later, forgot to button either. He would have lost his way altogether, but that the butcher lad who was present at his accident, happened to be in the house, and promised the landlord to see him home.

“It’s mony years sin’ we met, Mr. Donald,” said the young fellow, now a bearded, married man; “I’m sorry ye hae no’ forgotten yer little habit o’ tipplin’.”

“Itsch a shad habit, and bringsh a man

to ruin," said Donald, steadying himself by his companion's arm.

"Somethin' very like ruin in your case, I'm afeard," said the man; "even wee Maggie Græme would be ashamed to marry you in this state; pity you can't refrain!"

"Do you mean to insult me?" said Donald; and then came the dreary scene of quarrelsome incapability, ending in the man's forbearing to anger him, and compassionately leading him to the door of the Priory. They were all in bed except the housemaid, who sat up for him. Edith was on a visit.

"I don't think yer young master is well," said the man; "see him up to bed."

The next morning Edith returned to find him ill, and not up. The doctor arrived, he had taken cold, the sharp pain in his side was there again—the doctor advised his going south, Donald refused, he was determined on carrying through his examination, and made

light of his ailments, but he grew more and more dispirited, listless, and unsettled. Every letter that came from Maggie he opened with a dread of its containing the news that she was going to be married; she was quite capable even of that in her blind zeal for what she thought his welfare; and though there was no such announcement, the cheerful, happy tone of her mind, fretted and displeased him in its unlikeness to his own. Day after day he went to his room to study, and could not do it; at last the struggle became more than he could bear; he felt as if he were going mad—plunging his hands into his pockets, he stood a few moments by the window, looking out at the passengers battling with the wind and rain, and felt it was far easier than fighting his own cravings and misgivings. A strife with the elements might restore him, he walked up Prince's Street, but the weight at his heart tugged through all the assaults of wind and weather.

A craving for oblivion, if for nothing better, came over him ; he would not think, he could not resist any longer, it was useless struggling against fate. He was close to his old haunt "The Orb and Sceptre"—he entered, sought a private sitting-room, rang the bell, ordered a bottle of the best Cognac, and drank the whole of it.

CHAPTER VII.

"In vain we seek, in Nature's lap reclining,
To soothe the restless spirit pent within;
Our soul too surely turns, with sad repining,
Back on its haunting thoughts; some peace to win."

"WHAT is it, Nannie? Who is it making so much noise in the hall?" Edith walked out of the drawing-room to the landing and looked over the balustrade—there was a din, very unlike the usual quiet of the Priory. She saw a heap of moving coats, arms, and heads in the hall below; some men seemed half-dragging, half-supporting an inert body between them.

"Go back, Miss Edith," Nannie exclaimed with a tone of entreaty, but her young mistress had flown down like lightning, and recognised Donald, insensible, with flushed drawn face, and hair in wild confusion.

"What has happened? Is he hurt? Is it an accident?" she asked of the men.

"Well, not exactly, miss," replied one, who had the appearance of a waiter, taking off his hat respectfully, after depositing Donald on a chair; "the young gentleman will be all right to-morrow, a little headache, perhaps, you must give him plenty of soda water," he added aside to Nannie; "it was an accident like, as you may say, too; we didn't know when he ordered the brandy, as how he would take too much of it, and that it would have such an effect; it wouldn't have had, I am sure, if he hadn't taken it on to an empty stomach; our brandy is particularly good; our house is noted for its brandy and wine; a little of our old port now would have done him good, strengthened the young gentleman, and not been quite so heady."

Edith listened, but scarcely heard, only as she looked at Donald, the foul stench of the heated breath reached her, and the swollen features and helpless limbs revealed the awful truth of the man's words; a feeling of

sickening disgust made her grasp a chair for support.

"Hadn't we better get the gentleman upstairs?" suggested the cabman, while the waiter looked at Edith, and said, compassionately—

"Poor young lady! it's very distressing for her, under the circumstances."

He would have continued with irrepressible loquacity had not Mrs. Ramsay's footstep been heard on the landing, and Edith catching Nannie's sleeve, said—

"She must not see him;" but at the moment her mother was taking in the whole scene from the stairs.

"Go back into the drawing-room, Mistress Ramsay," Nannie almost shouted, but the lady walked deliberately down among them. One look at Donald, one exclamation—

"It is my son!" and she staggered through the dining-room door; it closed with a thud behind her.

“Get him away, Nannie,” Edith said, with a look of blank despair. They bore him to his bed, and in a few moments Edith was struggling to open the door of the dining-room; it was stopped by some heavy mass within.

“Mamma, mamma,” she cried frantically, another awful dread falling upon her; there was no answer; exerting all her remaining strength, she pushed the door sufficiently apart to see that Mrs. Ramsay was lying on the floor, one effort more, and she was inside. Was it death? or something worse, death in life?

* * * * *

The time for the examination had come and gone. Donald Ramsay's name was not even in the lowest class; his feeble attempts at study, after that fatal day, never amounted to even a few hours' real work, yet, with the fitful obstinacy of an enfeebled brain, nothing

would induce him not to attempt the examination. Edith and Uncle Aleck both tried all means of reasoning in vain; he went in, and was ignominiously plucked. Then his habits rapidly deteriorated; from the day he knew of the disgrace, he drank continuously, though only occasionally so hard, as to be brought home in the state we have described. Yet the household lived in constant dread. Mrs. Ramsay slowly recovered the partial use of her limbs; it had been a stroke of paralysis, and she was laid aside for many weeks; strength gradually returned; thanks to good nursing and careful rubbing. The blurred confused thought assumed, by degrees, its usual clearness; but she was a shattered woman. The shock of Donald's failure made her morose, she perfectly comprehended it, and felt the humiliation of a first disgrace in a long line of talented men, who had carried everything before them, but she made no remark; indeed, a little of her

former toleration for his failings came back; she was pleased when he read to her, proud even yet of his handsome face and figure.

The summer, to Edith's relief, was again passed at Inverardoch Cottage; there were fewer temptations there for Donald to indulge in immoderate drinking. This time Willie accompanied Mrs. Carnegie and her daughter, as Nellie's affianced lover; the commercial results of his literary labours, placed him above the necessity of being treated by any one. Mr. McCorquedaille had moreover admitted him to a small share in the business, and released him from a good deal of daily drudgery. But his happiest hours were still away from home. His presence acted like an irritating blister on Mrs. Ramsay's temper, and do what he would, nothing pleased her.

"Is it my fault?" he asked one day of Edith, with the old humility that never failed to depress him still in the society of his own family, when his mother had dismissed him

from her presence with hard, bitter words ; “ she says my well-doing has no real virtue in it ; that Donald’s vice has every excuse ; I cannot comprehend it, and can only conclude her brain is wrong.”

“ No doubt of it,” replied Edith : “ you have nothing to reproach yourself with, Willie. I am only thankful there is a refuge elsewhere for you, from the misery of our home, as it is now ; when it was brighter none of us thought of your happiness or comfort.”

“ Perhaps I am the better for that now, Edith ; spoiled children seldom turn out well ; but—I hope my wife that is to be will love all her children alike.”

So Willie went off for a happy ramble with Nellie and her mother, among the beauties of the *Salzkammergut*. The result was a book with excellent illustrations which brought that region into more general notice and inundated its fir-clothed hills and

romantic valleys with that irrepressible vagrant, the British tourist. Nellie declared on a subsequent visit, that had she known the locust flight the book would have caused she would have burnt every sketch that fell from her ready pencil; but we are anticipating.

Maggie's letters still came uninterruptedly. Donald's to her evidently threw no light on his present way of living. They had scarcely settled at Inverardoch before one arrived; it began thus :—

“ I am longing to hear the result of the examination. Send me the paper that I may see your honours in print, *sune* or *syne*, you must be a distinguished man, dear friend. You do not tell me what you are writing, ‘ no time for that, with so much study,’ you will say. I have an idea of giving to the world ‘ The Experiences of a Governess,’ or ‘ Sketches from a Convict Settlement,’ or a ‘ Romance of the Gold Fields,’ each and all would make

an amusing book. Well, now about myself. Mrs. Woodward is, to say the least, trying. The children have tempers of whose existence on the voyage I had no more conception than a new-born lamb has of butchers' knives and gory shambles. My first initiation was one day, when Minnie, the third girl, rushed up to the school-room, yelling like a bull of Basan, with a steel pen sticking into her cheek in a position dangerously near one eye.

“ ‘How did this happen?’ I asked, in horror.

“ ‘Jessie did it, o—h.’

“ After performing the surgical operation of drawing out the pen, and putting a real plaister on the wound, as well as a moral compress on her angry feelings, I went down in search of the offender. I found her livid with rage, pacing up and down the verandah, nursing a curious looking red place in the fleshy part of her arm, about an inch long.

“ ‘What is the matter with your arm?’

“ ‘Minnie bit it.’

“ ‘Before you stuck the pen in her cheek?’

“ ‘Yes.’

“ ‘What had you done?’

“ ‘Put her doll’s eyes out.’

“ ‘Why?’

“ ‘Because she broke my knife.’

“Utterly confounded by such a complication of savagery, I went and laid the case before Mrs. Woodward, saying, I really did not feel competent to deal with such blood-thirsty characteristics. It struck me she took it very coolly; but ushering both culprits into her presence, I shut the door on the maternal exercise of justice. Judge of my astonishment, when, on going down to dinner, I found the two girls in their places, as usual, Mrs. Woodward observing in a somewhat embarrassed tone—

“ ‘I am very sorry, Miss Græme, that Minnie and Jessie have been so naughty, but

as it is quite impossible to tell which is most in fault, I have let them both off.'

"I suppose my face said plainly enough—
'I think both are sufficiently in fault,' for she hastened to add—

" 'You think both ought to be severely punished, and I am not sure that you are not right, but they have promised solemnly not to do such horrid things again.'

"So that matter ended; but the consequence, as you may imagine, was, that in a few days something, nearly as bad, occurred again. This time I took the sword of justice into my own hands, and made the little creatures feel it had a keen edge. Mamma was told, of course, and said she could not allow such harsh measures; it would break the children's spirit, &c., &c. I appealed to Captain Woodward, who supported me, and held up the necessity of discipline; glad, I think, to have an opportunity of doing so. Another circumstance soon came to add discomfort to

the sore feeling between Mrs. Woodward and me. The children have a few glaring frailties in grammar and pronunciation, due, in part, to their mother's example. I was puzzled once by Jessie's saying, when I corrected an inaccuracy—

“ ‘ Mamma says that, Miss Græme.’

“ Fortunately I had the presence of mind to reply—

“ ‘ I am hereto teach you, not your mamma.’

“ Still, they are not bad children. I am growing really attached to them, and feel the power is daily strengthening in my hands. Captain Woodward undertook Ivan; he is not very bright, in fact, it is far too early for him to begin to learn at all. I hear them often in the room below the school-room; the father marshalling the alphabet, as if the letters were so many men, awaiting the word of command to enter into Ivan's poor little brain. The result is tears and fright; yet, on going down one morning,

after a series of explosions, I found the great man on his knees before the little heir of his tenderest affections, soothing, and almost begging pardon of the boy for the terror he had caused him.

“ ‘ Had you not better let me take him ? ’ I asked ; the poor man’s mortification at his want of self-command was ludicrous.

“ ‘ Will you ? ’ he answered gratefully ; ‘ I don’t think I was made for teaching.’ The result has been a series of object lessons in our walks, which Ivan delights in, and which occupy his little head quite enough for his tender age. He is my sworn friend and admirer, and he is always sent up with the ‘ Mail,’ which keeps me *en rapport* with home news.

“ But now I must tell you about my old man. He lives quite alone, in a tiny one-storied house, about a mile and a half from Rotonga ; a type of those the early settlers built, on first coming out. Every one of them but

this have disappeared before more ambitious edifices, which the tradesmen inhabit, who have made, and are making, rapid fortunes in Melbourne. I told you in a previous letter how much I was struck with his countenance and demeanour. One day, when passing with Ivan, the girls having gone into town with nurse, I made bold, stopped at the gate, and asked the name of a shrub he was pruning.

“‘Are you fond of flowers?’ he asked with the unmistakable accent of a gentleman.

“‘Very; they are, so many of them, new to me, and so unusually beautiful here,’ I answered; ‘and the fact of spring flowers coming in August and September make them seem all the more uncommon.’

“‘Will you come in and see my garden?’ he said, courteously; ‘I have two acres behind.’

“We needed no pressing; Ivan and I

followed him along the trimly kept paths beside hedges of passion flowers, while he displayed and named his treasures.

“ ‘That is a *sarsaparilla* you first admired, the green and white variety; like a *laburnum* in growth, isn’t it? This is another procumbent, a beautiful scarlet, like a magnified French bean; you find it gleaming in the long grass everywhere.’

“ ‘I have gathered it often, and little dreamed of its belonging to such a useful family.’

“ ‘This is a third—my favourite.’

“ ‘He led the way to an arbour, almost covered with what looked like a miniature *wisteria*, shaded from the richest purple, up to the most delicate mauve.

“ ‘And this is a *sarsaparilla* also? I shall have more respect than ever for the medicine.’ Then he showed us rare lilies—*Ixias* and *Speraxis*—I think he called them, decked in flowers of blue green, with purple centres; and then a green plant called the Devil’s

Snuff Box. When the blossom is touched it instantly folds inward on itself, and exudes a drop of thick, dark liquid; it looked uncanny, and Ivan shrank back.

“ ‘Right! right! my child,’ said the old man, stroking the boy’s cheek; ‘keep far from him; have a pure horror of his presence; it may save you from sin and sorrow.’ ”

“ His words seemed spoken with such earnest meaning, that silence fell on us all, and he seemed lost in thought. I am sure he has a history, and that no common one. We took our leave, and carried off a handful of flowers, which he picked, and tied up for us. It has become a regular thing since to go in whenever we see him in his garden. He does his own cooking, makes his own bed, and does almost everything himself, except a weekly washing of floors, and general cleaning, which a poor widow manages for him. His name is Cartwright. That is all that any one knows about him, except that he is English. He

is called 'The old gentleman,' and in this fluctuating, restless, population, very few remember his coming to the cottage. Now and then, when the holes in the roof get too large, he has them patched up, but refuses to have repairs made, saying it will last his time. I think he likes Ivan and me to go and see him, for he never asks the elder children further than the front garden, no one but the charwoman has ever passed his threshold, not even Mr. Mauleverer. If he were not most daintily neat and clean, I should call him 'The Hermit,' but there is always a dash of griminess connected with those gentlemen of unsocial memory. He must formerly have been superbly handsome. Every quarter, he pays a visit to the bank in Melbourne, and draws a certain sum ; a letter from England always being the precursor of these, his only absences from home. I confess to have had the vulgar curiosity of asking the postman if he ever took him any letters, and thus ob-

tained this information. I don't know whether this interests you ; give me a hint to leave off if it does not ; he has made a profound impression upon me.

“ I have a fear weighing upon me that the Mauleverers are not happy ; my Sundays are generally spent with them, it is a relief to the Woodwards, and me, and a change for Mrs. Mauleverer. I generally find a new servant every third Sunday. They land, take a situation, and if worth anything, indeed if worth nothing, find a sweetheart, and straightway get married. The last time I went, there was none at all. Mrs. Mauleverer and I tried to milk the goat, but could not manage it, until he returned from the school, and grasped the beast by the horns, when she held the basin, and I managed to extract about half-a-pint of milk, and we spilled one third of that. Fancy an Oxford B.D., engaged in such a joint stock agricultural operation. I enjoyed myself again, and

shocked Mrs. Woodward by saying so, and describing the old days, when Beauty would follow me all about the meadows for salt. I did not dare to tell her who was with me, and how she became the object of a sonnet, and of such absurd doings, as having a daisy wreath wound round her horns, when the spring flowers were plentiful, and the sweet April evenings grew long, while the birds warbled out their happy lays. Ah! what a dream that life seems now!—and this is but another, the scenes are only shifted, and the actors play with others, not the old companions of the past. Is it all a fantastic drama, on which death will draw the curtain, and leave us to an unknown, untried, reality? Or are we to be the better, and wiser, for this life and the next, after all our hard learned lessons of experience? My friend, but for hope, we were sad indeed.

“Your true friend,

“MAGGIE.”

CHAPTER VIII.

“ Poor wrecks of spent humanity !—We flutter
Awhile, amid the vanities of earth,
With mute heart-sickness, words seem vain to utter,
Uncomprehending life, or death, or birth.”

UNCLE ALECK and Edith were seated in a deep and painful consultation within the four walls of the drawing-room at Inverardoch Cottage.

“ My dear Edith, it must not go on any longer ; this life is killing you and your mother also. My duty as guardian to this unhappy lad, gives me the privilege for a few months at least, of insisting on his being put under proper medical treatment.”

“ Is it really come to that, Uncle Aleck ? Would it not be right to try and keep him at home a little while ? ”

“ No, Edith ; when he is of age, he may refuse to be ordered about for his own benefit ; at present I have the power to think for him. I can scarcely comprehend how these few

months can have produced such total wreck, it must have been going on for years, in a small way ; beer and wine at luncheon, the same at dinner, again at night, with occasional excesses of unknown amount, since that month last year with Harry Carmichael."

"He has never recovered that, Uncle Aleck; it laid the seeds of the delicacy in his chest."

"There is no end to the mischief raw spirit does, Edith ; I have studied the subject, it draws all the water from a man's system, it enters his body by every absorbing surface, skin, stomach, blood, even by inhalation, taken as Donald has done lately, and does now, when he can get it ; undiluted, it coagulates the blood itself, changing, poisoning it in fact."

"I see the pink flush on his cheeks, uncle, and the rapidity with which his heart beats ; I notice it even through his clothes."

"All symptoms," said Mr. Seton sadly ;

“ a doctor once told me that the action of a human heart produced by alcohol has reached twenty-five thousand strokes in the twenty-four hours ; that means, it performs a work equal to the labour of lifting over twenty-four tons weight, one foot, in the day and night. No wonder he loses strength, and has no appetite. I should not be the man I am at seventy-eight if I had drunk even one pint of beer a day, or a couple of glasses of sherry. Look at my limbs now ! my men have all compounded for their beer, and work better on tea. I have been some years a total abstainer, and so are many more. Montague Dewar, you know, was.

“ I remember,” said Edith, “ though he never gave me a reason for it. I wondered at the quiet determination with which he bore the rallying of his friends on the subject, without ever swerving an inch from his resolve. Do you ever see him at Craigstane, uncle ?”

“ He visits me occasionally ; he likes spending the Sunday at my place ; we walk over the land together ; he would soon be as good a farmer as he is a lawyer. He never asks directly after you Edith, but I tell him all about you ; this proposal about Donald comes from him. He has a friend living on the wolds of Yorkshire, who has had a vast experience in the treatment of such cases.”

Edith bent over a bouquet of flowers on the table, and hid both her changing colour and the blinding tears. Uncle Aleck thought her hard in the matter of Montague Dewar ; one word from her, he felt certain, would bring him to her feet again ; yet often as he had prepared the way for her saying it, it was left unsaid.

“ I think then, uncle,” she replied at last, in answer to his last sentence, “ you had better do as you propose about Donald ; it might be best for poor mamma.”

“ I will sound her about it after dinner,

though I expect resistance. Do you ever hear of that girl, Maggie Græme ?”

“ She writes regularly to Donald ;” replied Edith ; “ I think with Nannie, we had better have let him go to Australia ; but yet I wish Maggie a better fate than that of being a drunkard’s wife, even though my brother’s happiness is at stake ; it is a dread look-out for any woman ; I think I must write and tell her the true state of affairs, that she may relinquish any hope she may still cherish. I know how unwillingly a girl gives up real affection, though her letters are those of a friend, not a lover.”

“ Do so by all means,” said Mr. Seton. The conversation was stopped by Donald’s entrance. He was indeed changed, handsome his face remained, but it had lost its frank, happy expression ; his step its elasticity, his eye its brightness. He looked afraid of observation, seemed suspicious of being the object of consultation, and his whole manner

had an uneasiness entirely foreign to his former self-possession. When Edith left the room, Uncle Aleck opened the subject of his removal at once. As quietly as his indignation would allow him, he began—

“Are you aware, Donald, that Edith is breaking her heart, and on your account?”

“I may have something to do with making her unhappy,” Donald answered; “but the affair about Montague Dewar has more.”

“That may be, but your conduct is a much sorer trial to both her and your mother. What are your plans for your future life?”

“What is the good of asking me such a question?” replied the wretched fellow, turning on his heels, and confronting the old man with hands thrust in his pockets, misery depicted on every feature. “I am craving drink at this moment to quench my raging desire for it. I have spent every farthing I have in the world to get more, and am in debt besides; I know I am killing the women

I ought to help and comfort. I would kill myself if I dared, but—”

He turned to the window, rested his head on his arms, and sobbed like a child. He was a child in weakness, with the trust and purity of childhood gone for ever.

“Donald, my poor boy,” said Uncle Aleck, rising, and putting his hand on his shoulder; “you are sick of a disease which only time and earnest endeavour can cure; but it is possible to redeem the past, and yet make up for the sorrow you have caused; will you consent to go for a while to a medical man, and promise to abide by his advice, and submit to his direction—be treated, in fact, like the invalid you really are? I will pay the necessary expenses.”

Donald was silent.

“It is an asylum for drunkards you are thinking of,” he said at last; “I am to be put under a kind of bodily restraint; I don’t think I could stand that yet, Uncle Aleck.”

“It is your only chance, Donald. I give you credit for shame and sorrow over your condition, and it must get worse unless the means I have offered are resorted to. Is there no human soul whose claim on your better nature is superior to the power of this enslaving vice? Surely, Donald, the last spark of love and goodness is not put out for ever !”

A strong conflict seemed going on in the poor fellow's mind, then he turned and faced Mr. Seton more calmly.

“Where will you send me? Is it far from here?”

“On the wild Yorkshire hills, far from any one you know. There will be no one but yourself, with this gentleman and his wife, a cultivated, charming woman.”

“I will go, uncle—to-morrow—to-day if you like.”

“Thank God, Donald. Done of your own free will, it may be of use. I shall propose

it to your mother as a visit we are going to pay together—you understand—she might otherwise object.”

Glad to have so far attained his end, Uncle Aleck once more joined Edith in the garden to tell of Donald's consent.

“You will be freed from one source of anxiety, at least, my poor child,” he said, in conclusion; “we shall feel something is being done for him, and you will no longer have the constant dread of encountering the sight and loathsome terror of a drunkard.”

To Uncle Aleck's surprise and alarm, Edith burst into a fit of uncontrollable emotion; sobs shook her whole frame; she was, in fact, wholly unnerved by the months of nursing in her mother's room, the trial of Donald's miserable life, and her own secret sorrow. Uncle Aleck waited for her to become calmer, with a compassion equal to her grief he was watching her with his blue eyes, too dimmed with tears to see

much, but in a voice of the gentlest tenderness he said—

“My poor little dove is worn out with sorrow, and she bears it all alone. May not the old uncle be trusted to carry some, and lighten the load a little?”

The gentle kindness, the infinite pity of the words seemed to wring Edith’s heart afresh, but she raised her head at length, and answered—

“Uncle Aleck, you are right; perhaps it would have been better to have told you long ago; but the trial has lasted so long, it has become second nature to me to bear without asking sympathy, as another did before me.”

“As he does now, Edith, as he will to his dying day; why make two people needlessly unhappy?”

“Ah! dear Uncle Aleck, you do not understand me. I am not speaking now of Montague Dewar; when he feels the time for speaking has come he will find me unchanged.

I can wait—he knows it ; the next word must come from him. I was thinking of my father.”

“ Your father, Edith, what do you mean ? This is something I was not aware of.”

“ Did you not often wonder why papa looked so sad ?” Edith went on ; “ he was naturally grave, but he had no need to grow grey and aged as he did long before his time ; to be cut off a comparatively young man. Uncle Aleck, Donald was born with a predisposition to this awful habit. Mamma has been a confirmed drunkard for years.”

Edith clasped her hands over her throbbing heart, and Uncle Aleck sprang from his seat as if shot. The secret so faithfully kept had leaped out of her overburthened breast ; the mother, tenderly shielded by her own and Nannie’s care, was acknowledged to be the abject slave of a degrading habit for the first time since she had learned the fatal truth beside her dying father’s bed.

After his first exclamation—"Good God ! what do you say !" Uncle Aleck remained utterly speechless ; the long vista of suffering that lay behind on the path of this fair, gentle girl, which she had trod alone, unaided by human power, perfectly appalled him ; good men are so unwilling their women should be fretted and hurt, that the sudden knowledge of a secret sorrow comes to them like a reproach, a want of care and thought in them, that no penitence or after endeavour can atone for. The hand that grasped hers trembled with deep emotion, tears found their way down the old man's cheeks, and his utmost effort was needed for self-control as he thought of this his favourite relative, a prey to double and treble anxiety during the best years of her young life.

"Edith, Edith, are you born for nothing but trouble ?" he cried ; "child, angel," he said, putting his arms round her, "how have you trodden the weary way so patiently ? and not a murmur ! not a repining word !"

“Women need faith, they cannot do without trust in a God of love, Uncle Aleck,” she answered, turning her gentle face to his; “it was only by holding His hand in the dark days, and in the dangerous places.” Edith stopped. Those two knew the secret of endurance and patience; the power of long-suffering love lay in that acknowledgment of steady, earnest clinging to the Father. Uncle Aleck had learned his lesson early in the school of suffering, and over the long line of years between them, both met on equal ground here; the old believer and the young knew no other way of comfort and repose.

“Our sad secret is safe in your keeping, Uncle Aleck; Nannie will not like my telling even you. But for her faithful care all the world must have known it years ago; since my mother’s illness, it has been easier for us to control the craving, but she has less power of concealment herself; the remorse which never failed to succeed every excess, is ex-

pressed now in allusions and hints, that people attribute to a weakened brain; especially with regard to Donald, whom she speaks of as impelled by a power beyond his ability to resist, and which renders his conduct comparatively excusable. She says this to him, until I dread his yielding up the last shred of responsibility and will, and sinking into fatalism without an effort at reform. The habit began with my poor mother in the weakness and ill-health that preceded his birth. Dr. Forrest had gone abroad for his health, leaving a younger man to take his practice; you must remember him, though I do not; he prescribed brandy, and by the time Dr. Forrest returned the taste had become confirmed."

"The taint had its origin further back even than that," said Uncle Aleck, in a low hurried tone; "I could tell a similar story; the sins of the fathers literally visit the third and fourth generation. Thank God! His

mercies are promised also to thousands of them, who do not break the laws He has ordained ; his ways are as unchanging about the Juggernaut of strong drink as of the graven images of the wandering Israelites ; only, where thousands perished for the golden calf millions are sacrificed to the golden wine. Edith, the last remaining years of my life shall be passed in doing sterner battle against this cruel foe of our race ; my latest testimony, while I have yet strength and life, shall be against this foul tyrant of our age." The old man drew himself up to his full height ; as with kindling eye, and all the energy of excited feeling, he raised his hands and spoke in clear ringing tones, Edith realised for the first time what a power he must have wielded in youth.

"I shall allow no more wine on the table ;" said she, "for Donald's sake ; if it is there he always takes it, and thus the habit is kept up."

At dinner accordingly no wine appeared. Donald remarked it.

“ They have forgotten to put the decanters on the table, Edith,” he said, going to the sideboard. He found it locked.

“ I do not intend to have any for the future Donald,” his sister answered ; “ mamma and I seldom touch it. Uncle Aleck never.” Donald made no remark, but he knew what was intended by the change. Mrs. Ramsay had never transgressed in society, she dared not trust herself, and had the courage to refrain ; Nannie had always striven to regulate her private allowance, but with the cunning of people similarly affected, she regularly stole from the sideboard, or procured supplies from outside.

She acceded to the plan for Donald at once ; he was not well, change of air would do him good ; he was constitutionally weak, poor fellow ; it was strange they had not thought of it before ; poor Donald ! people did not

know all he had to contend with ; no one understood his struggles better than herself, least of all Willie ; Willie had no tact, he might be clever with his pen, in a certain way, and in getting on in the world, by the help of other people, but he had no genius, no inborn fire, not a tithe of Donald's natural *verve*. If Donald could only overcome his fatal weakness, the world would soon see where the true talent lay. Uncle Aleck looked at Edith. Every sentence fell on his ear with double significance, since their talk after the revelation of the morning. With a dawn of hope struggling in the general depression of heart, each member of the household sought their night's rest, and next morning Uncle Aleck and Donald set out on their travels.

Edith drew out her desk, and sat down to the difficult task of writing to Maggie. Sheet after sheet was begun and torn up ; no words seemed appropriate to tell so sad a story ; yet told it must be.

The record of the last few months' sorrow closed with words of hope about the new experiment. If he never followed his profession as an advocate, Willie's influence might help him with the publishers, and his example encourage him to try literary work. "Write to him still, Maggie ; your esteem is the only rag of comfort left to him ; it is the last peg on which to hang a remnant of self-respect. Write to me as well. I read your letters with growing interest. He has I think shown me all, except the first. I want to hear the result of your teaching ; what you find out more about your "sweet old man." Every revelation shall be kept sacred ; I have long been used to close the doors of speech upon skeletons of trouble ; and above all things, Maggie, never forget I look on you as one who ought to have been my sister ; whom I do not dare to hope I may ever lay claim to as such, unless something little short of a miracle bring Donald back to the paths of sobriety and

goodness ; even then, Maggie, I could not expect that you would marry him."

The letter brought a reply in about two months, sad in the extreme, but saying she expected no better news; the failure in the examination, which Donald's last letter announced, prepared her for evil consequences. Though full of gratitude for Edith's affectionate feelings to herself, she acknowledged that nothing short of complete reformation would induce her to marry her brother, and that seemed hopeless ; she had foreseen the end from the month spent with Harry Carmichael ; his friend she would remain, faithful even to death, to life-long loneliness ; even as his servant, she would be content to minister to him, and use what influence she possessed in keeping him from temptation. Her letter ended by asking a solemn promise from Edith, that if ever she needed help that she could render, she would prove her sisterhood, by sending for her. Edith closed the letter

feeling that the world was the better for possessing such a woman. The chill damps of autumn clung round the cottage, and Edith was not very sorry to return to town, but there the absence of Donald was still painfully felt, both by Mrs. Ramsay and herself.

CHAPTER IX.

“ A noble, generous youth,
Stormed thro’ tumultuous life,
His loins girt up for valiant deeds,
And panting for the strife :
He did not see the snares
By wealth and folly laid ;
Felt not his senses numbed and chilled,
As right and left he strayed :
Till waking, as by magic touch,
The ripened man was stirred,
Gazed on the wreck of youth, and said,
“ I know that I have erred :
Thy servant busied here and there, forgot
The treasure given in charge, and it is not.”

A few days before Donald’s twenty-first birthday, Edith had drawn her chair in front of the fire, and was absorbed in a new book ; not the last novel from the lending library, but a volume that demanded careful reading and continuous attention. Nannie came in with letters.

“ One from Donald, and one from Maggie Græme,” she said, with the freedom of an old tried servant ; “ I canna stay noo, but ye’ll tell me by-and-by, Miss Edith.”

“Certainly, Nannie,” said her young mistress, reading in the true eyes, an anxiety equal to her own. It was a cold February day, sleet and snow, driven by a keen north-west wind, made the streets of Edinburgh one vast slippery surface of mud ; and the hearts of those who had no occupation to keep the weather out of their heads, were rendered supremely miserable. Such a climate, or rather a climate subject to such visitations of frequent wind and rain—for Edinburgh as well as other places, has its days of sunshine—must have had great influence in forming the resisting power of the Scotch as a nation ; it has driven them in upon themselves and solitude ; so that undisturbed by the amenities of a genial atmosphere, hard work has become a refuge and a joy. Successive generations have strengthened hereditary predispositions and habits. But for the yearning for sunnier climes, which nothing can wholly eradicate from the inhabitants of colder tem-

peratures, the Scot would have hardened to the very bone and marrow, and been a most unloveable creature. There is a perceptible difference in the same individual abroad and at home; even after years of foreign life, and intercourse with natives of lands endowed with softer qualifications than his own, might have been supposed to have dissolved the rigid outer rind of the character; such, however, were not Edith's reflections as she read Donald's letter :—

“Dear Edith,—You must not think me weak and changeable, but I have a great longing to spend my birthday at home. It may be the last I shall spend in this world. The punishment of my wicked folly has come quickly. Mr. Letts told me as gently as he possibly could yesterday that consumption had set in; my lungs are both affected; in short, that I am doomed to an early death. The suspicion has been struggling into certainty, in my own mind for some months; I was not

surprised to have it confirmed. He says next winter must be passed in a warmer climate, if I wish to survive it. I am not sure that I do. With every chance of happiness, I wrecked my life in its beginning, and now strength is denied me to prove my repentance to my fellow men. If I drink again, I know it will be a speedier going to my grave. Here all temptation has been kept from me, and thank God the craving seems gone ; but once within reach of it again, whether I shall fall I cannot tell. I have learned to distrust myself. May I come home, dear sister ? Your determination to banish all stimulants will help me ; and God knows how willingly I would refrain. When I think of my past, and all it must have cost you, I am ashamed to sign myself affectionate. I am your humbled brother,—DONALD RAMSAY.”

Edith laid the letter on her knee, and indulged in saddest thought. This then was

to be the bitter end—youth lost, talent wasted, death near.

“ His life a watch, or a vision
Between a sleep and a sleep.”

The mystery seemed more than she could fathom, the sorrow overwhelming; where was the necessity for future punishment in a case like this? It had worked its own already, in the untold bitterness of broken hopes and declining strength, and the dumb misery of useless regret; hell must be made for the decent and respectable, who only sin in thought not deed, and who come to no retribution in this life, and who in an ignorant world's estimation need no repentance. Surely the poor prodigal thus returning must be gathered into the arms of the Father of love, if her mortal heart could so yearn over a stricken brother. How very soon all would be lying in their quiet graves, the fitful fever of life past and gone, the mother, the dying

son, herself. Willie and Nellie seemed happily outside all the sorrow ; it had caught Maggie in its folds. The desolation of the household seemed like some waste howling wilderness, where the blasts of fate were assailing them on all sides, and they were unable to resist. Was she really going to die herself, and the whole troubled dream be past and done for ? No, no ; He, the sinless One, never rested till His sacrifice was ended. Pharisees, Sadducees, lawyers, false disciples, and traitorous apostle were all alive, surviving innocence, when He yielded up the ghost. What right had she to expect rest and happiness ? She must go on : the mother must be told, Donald welcomed and nursed ; both in the long course of years laid to rest, before she dared think of peace for herself. Who has not known such moments of intense and lonely sorrow ? How she longed at this moment for Maggie ! Then she remembered the letter from her, and read it :—

“ Thornbush.

“ Do not be surprised at the address,” it began. “ My sojourn at Rotonga is at an end. Perhaps I have been wrong, impatient ; have behaved in a manner unbecoming my situation in life. Perhaps I undertook as a governess what I could not carry out. Certainly, I feel a sense of failure and humiliation. Hear and judge, dear friend, when I have told my story. I told you that I did not think Mrs. Woodward equal to her husband ; at this moment I am convinced of it. Mr. Mauleverer tells me she was the daughter of a rich, but ignorant merchant in Geelong. Captain Woodward met her when out here on Government business, some years ago. She was young, handsome, and high-spirited, but thoroughly uneducated in the true sense of the word ; and wholly devoid of self control. He took her home with him to England, but she did not agree with or please his family, and they were estranged ;

and when the appointment he now holds was offered him, he sold out of the army and took it. I fear he is not happy ; her ungovernable temper bringing discomfort on servants and governess, and all subjected to its outbursts. When I had obtained complete mastery over the children, and all trouble with them ceased, she became jealous of me. For six months before I left, she scarcely addressed a word to me at table ; merely asking me what I would take to eat. I could not have believed how irksome such behaviour becomes after a time. If Mrs. Mauleverer asked after me when calling, the housemaid had orders to take her up to the schoolroom ; no friends of mine were on any account to be shown into the drawing-room. All this seems horribly paltry, but it is part of the story. One day, when walking in Melbourne, to my astonishment I met Mr. Harry Carmichael. He was staying at Government House, and walking with the

Governor's son. He recognised me at once, and enquired where I was staying. I gave him the name of the parish, as the vaguest address possible, but he found out I was with the Woodward's, and a few days ago these two promising youths came out to call especially on me. According to orders, Alice, the housemaid, invited them straightway into the schoolroom. Fancy my disgust at the creature whom I regard as our poor Donald's evil genius accosting me as an old friend, and claiming a right as such to come and visit me ! I sent the children out of the room, and gave him the broadest hints that his presence was undesirable ; but he refused to take them. At last he provoked me beyond endurance, by observing—

“ ‘ Your old friend, Donald Ramsay, has gone entirely to the dogs, my father tells me. I had not given him credit for being such a fool. A fellow may be a bit wild, but there's moderation even in the speed one sends one-

self to destruction. I shall cut him when I go back.'

"I rose, shut the window, I am afraid, with a bang, in my indignation, and said, I was not the mistress of my own time, and must beg him to go; then the Governor's son, who had hitherto contented himself with staring, stammered out that his mother would send me an invitation to the ball at Government House, the following week. I said I did not dance, or go to large parties; and at last got rid of my unwelcome callers. The invitation came next day; Mrs. Woodward delivered it at dinner, with the sarcastic remark—

"'Had I known my *governess* possessed such aristocratic acquaintances, I should have hesitated to engage her; or fitted up a special room for their reception.'

"'I dare say Miss Græme's friends are just as well pleased to see her in the school-room,' put in Captain Woodward, anxious to assuage the coming storm; 'you will enjoy

an evening at Government House, they are amusing, one sees much more variety of classes than in England.'

" 'Much more, indeed,' said Mrs. Woodward; 'I wonder at Lady M—— having the bad taste to invite Miss Græme and me at the same time.'

" 'I am not going,' I observed.

" 'There will be many far inferior to the lady into whose charge I have given my daughters,' said Captain Woodward, with angry emphasis, and a glance at Alice, but Mrs. Woodward would not take a hint.

" 'I should have thought a person sufficiently superior for that post would have seen the impropriety of entertaining young men in the schoolroom, necessitating the children's being sent away; the indelicacy of the proceeding is great, to say nothing of the interruption to lessons, and the evil example to the inferior dependents of the house.'

“The sentence was intended to be cutting ; Alice who is devoted to me, coloured up.

“ ‘My orders, ma’am, were to ask all Miss Græme’s visitors into the schoolroom ; I should not have taken the gentlemen there if one had not begged me to let him give her a surprise, as he came from Edinburgh. I ought not to have done it.’

“ ‘Leave the room,’ said Mrs. Woodward, peremptorily ; and Alice set down the dish she held, and departed.

“ ‘I think Miss Græme, if you do not mind, you and the children had better do the same thing,’ Captain Woodward remarked, with rising wrath, his lips white, and his eyes glittering.

“ ‘I do not choose that Miss Græme should go,’ said Mrs. Woodward, excitedly. ‘I have had enough of airs and graces in a governess. I will have no one in my house, with such acquaintances ; the servants are not allowed followers.’

“This was hard to bear, considering the disgust my unlucky visitors caused me; I rose up, and fear my answer was haughty, and my manner unbecoming.

“‘You are mistaken, if you think I knew anything of this visit beforehand, or that I desire a second, or that I intrigued in any way to get this invitation. I told Mr. M—— it would be of no use to send it.’

“‘It is by no means an unusual thing for the governess of a family to be included in an invitation out here,’ replied Captain Woodward; ‘and my wife knows it; there are not so many educated people in the colony, that they can afford to slight those who are.’

“I am sure he did not mean this speech as a slight upon Mrs. Woodward; she unfortunately took it in that light.

“‘I may not be so well educated as your governess, Captain Woodward, but as your wife, I am her superior in position, and I demand its acknowledgment from both of

you. I desire, therefore,' she continued, turning to me, 'that you leave this house as soon as you can get your boxes packed; the salary due to you for the rest of the half year shall be paid in full. The carriage will be ready to take you wherever you desire to go, at five o'clock.'

" 'I have nowhere to go, Mrs. Woodward,' I answered quietly, although my wrath was great; 'I am a stranger in a strange land; you turn me out homeless and houseless; but I do not fear. I am innocent of wrongdoing, and the God of the helpless will guide me aright.'

" Captain Woodward's face was working with restrained anger.

" 'Emma,' he said, hoarsely, 'if you carry out this unjust decision, I will never allow another lady to enter my house as governess; the children shall be sent to school; you know what that means here. I am determined,' he added, as she smiled contemptu-

ously, 'they shall all go to school to-morrow, if Miss Græme is driven from my house to-day.'

"It was an unseemly altercation. Little Ivan, who had been listening with eyes wide open with affright, burst into tears, and sprang into my arms; the elder children had sense enough to restrain their feelings, whatever they were.

"Captain Woodward opened the door as I was leaving the room.

" 'Miss Græme, will you not go and consult Mr. and Mrs. Mauleverer? They are your friends, and will, perhaps, offer you a home until you hear of another situation, or can make preparations for returning to England; in the latter case I pay every farthing of the expenses necessary for the voyage. You children give what help you can; I am going to St. Kilda.'

"Captain Woodward spoke with a decision I had often, in my secret heart, wished he

would have manifested before. The best boarding school in the neighbourhood of Melbourne was situated in the suburb he mentioned; Mrs. Woodward's face grew pale, for she had a mortal aversion to sending her offspring away from her own supervision, but she was too proud to give way before the children, even though they all burst into tears at the thought of banishment. I felt glad to see the man and the husband assert his authority, yet this sudden termination of my engagement was not pleasant to my feelings, or flattering to my pride. The suggestion about the Mauleverers seemed a good one. I put on my bonnet, and walked across the fields; at the farthest extremity of the home enclosure I heard voices; the voices I was learning to love.

“ ‘It will be horrid,’ I heard Ethel say; ‘but we must obey papa, and obey willingly, as Miss Græme tells us we ought; that makes all the difference in doing what we are told.’

“‘Perhaps mamma will think better of it, and ask her to come back,’ suggested Minnie.

“‘I’m afraid she will never do that,’ said Jessie, the eldest of the three girls. ‘She does not like Miss Græme, and I cannot think why—we have never been so well taught, or made to mind before.’

“‘One thing is, we haven’t got to think,’ said Ethel; ‘it makes our way plain; but, oh! I do love Miss Græme.’

“‘And so do I,’ was echoed back from the others. Jessie added—

“‘I only hope she won’t go back to England, and then we shall have a chance of seeing her sometimes.’

“This was grateful to my feelings; I longed to go in for a general hug, but I forbore; my teaching was working the way I wished, and that was sufficient.

“Trouble met me again at the Mauleverers. I had no sooner entered the room than I saw

she was ill or unhappy; flushed cheeks, trembling hands, and pupils nervously distended spoke of mental or physical strain.

“‘I am glad you are come,’ he said, coldly, and left the room.

“I sat down, and took her hands in mine, they were feverish.

“‘What is it?’

“‘Oh! I am wretched,’ she rather sobbed than said; and then came a fit of hysterical weeping. I left her time to recover, and she went on, saying, ‘I have been very wrong, but this climate is partly the cause; I never feel well, the air seems to have no freshness in it, and Edward is not thoughtful. I told him just this moment, when he worried about the dinner never being well cooked, or his clothes mended, and said the school accounts were in a hopeless muddle, and that the rent in his surplice must be mended before service to-morrow, that it was a pity he married me, and he said—he thought it *was*.’

“ She hid her face on my shoulder, and I saw it all: the poor little woman had learned to love her husband, but his feeling for her had not kept pace in warmth and progress. I had feared it, and it was too true.

“ ‘That is not all,’ she continued; ‘ he is always talking about clever people—of their capability of doing everything well. I know he meant you, and I said it was a pity he had not seen you before I came out. Don’t be angry, dear, I am not really jealous of you, you are too honest and true for me to fear; but it was a hard thing for him to say to me, away from all my people, out here alone. I wish I had not come. He did not want me, that was the real truth; he only became engaged to me out of gratitude to my mother and father for nursing him through a severe illness, when he was brought to our lodgings in Oxford, half-dead. I wish I were dead, or that you could come and help me.’

“ ‘What if I did pay you a little visit and take all worry off your shoulders, and give you the opportunity of resting entirely? The doctor says it is the only chance for your getting better, and that your health may be ruined for years, unless you follow his advice.’

“ ‘But you cannot come,’ she said, getting up; ‘there is no possibility of such luck.’

“ ‘Lie down, and listen to me;’ then I told her the history of the day, concluding with, ‘So you see, you will be doing a charitable deed—giving me my board and lodging in return for any services I can render in the house or parish; it will be a fair bargain, and a boon to me, a homeless girl, a stranger here like yourself; to begin, where is that surplice?’

“ ‘She told me where to find it, and as I worked, more of the facts surrounding the case came out.

“ ‘I think Edward came here that I might not be thrown among his friends; he made

his health an excuse, but they hated me ; they are proud people. He pretended to be disgusted with class distinctions in England, and to admire the equality that prevails out here, but I know he feels absolutely alone ; there are scarcely any men his equals in knowledge. I used to think on board ship how much better Mr. Foster was suited to me ; but he took more to you than me, Maggie. I stand no chance against you.'

"I saw she was not jealous, that I might safely go and help her ; and when Mr. Maul-everer came back it was arranged I should go in the evening. He walked part of the way with me to Rotonga, and I read him by the way a mild, obliquely-aimed lecture on the sacredness of the marriage tie, of the separation it was of the wife from home and friends, and former joys ; and the opportunities it afforded for manly tenderness, and noble self-denial on the husband's part. I must have waxed eloquent, for a great deal

of my homily found its way into the next Sunday morning's sermon, and several people remarked to me how unusually good it was. At any rate, he has been much kinder to his wife since, and I am installed as head nurse, cook, and housekeeper, and deputy-parson's help-mate in visiting the sick. I left Rotonga in the evening as soon as I had packed. Captain Woodward said, 'I have sent your luggage, and countermanded the carriage, Miss Græme; the children wish to walk with you, and have some last words on the way. I shall be at the Mauleverers' gate to bring them back.' It was prettily done, and though he said nothing more, the sense of his confidence in me made me feel very grateful. At the gate he took both my hands and grasped them with real warmth. 'The children have never been so happy—they will not forget your love and kindness;' then he turned, and left abruptly. The three girls were taken to St. Kilda's next morning. Mrs.

Woodward does not acknowledge me in any way at present ; it is not pleasant, but I hope I am not altogether in fault. I am very near my dear old Mr. Cartwright. The heat this summer (December, remember) oppresses him; I found him one day quite worn out and weak ; he had not strength to cook his dinner, and had I not gone in and insisted on doing it, would have starved all day. He said I was a first-rate *artiste*, and that he could not accomplish anything half as good. I hope in time to induce him to let Mr. Mauleverer pay him a visit. The two would get on, for he is extremely well read ; I can tell that with my small amount of knowledge. He shrinks most unaccountably from his fellow men. I find he lived for many years in Western Australia ; the flowers, he says, are far more beautiful there than here ; and I think these most lovely. Mr. Mauleverer is going to buy a cow, as I can make butter. A dear, little Irish *lady* lives in the parish,

whose husband teaches music in the common schools. I believe they ran away when she was a school girl, and he was giving her lessons. Every one has a history in Australia, generally a sad one. She forgot all her fine notions as soon as they landed, set to work to learn housekeeping, and now teaches and clothes all her ten children ; makes splendid butter, has no servant, cuts out and sews, making the elder ones help her, and is a true type of the real unselfish, cheerful, Irish woman. The husband wants me to apply for the place of head mistress in one of the common schools. The salary is high, and the position a good one throughout the colony, where teachers and learning both take rank in their really proper places. One near Melbourne drives to her school daily in her carriage, and intends to retire soon on her savings. It strikes me forcibly that I might do worse than follow her example ; it is a far more independent position than that of a

private governess, as I have just learned. At present I shall devote myself to the Maul-everers—I owe them much, and she greatly needs rest and care; and I have my half year's earnings to fall back upon. The women of this colony work hard at household duties all day, and go in for excitement of an evening, and, whenever they can get it, pic-nics, races, concerts, fancy balls, cards, dancing and theatres; nothing comes amiss to them; but, alas! many are primed for the double duty by repeated doses of chlorodyne or alcohol; they are amazed at me for taking nothing but water. Every third house in the streets of Melbourne seems devoted in some way to the sale of strong drink; the hot winds excite thirst—stimulants perpetuate it; the liver suffers, and the end is too often the Yarra Bend, as the monstrous Lunatic Asylum is called, which rears its huge bulk, at a romantic turn of the river, which bears that name. *Yarra yarra*, flowing, flowing,

to me a beautiful name. Good-bye ; your letters are my sweetest, but also my saddest distractions.

“ Yours faithfully,

“ MAGGIE.”

CHAPTER X.

*"The sickness, care, and sadness, labour, neglect, and fear,
Ruin, and blight, and failure, may make us weary here;
But there is hope and gladness, borne on the south wind's wing,
As breath'd o'er beds of violets, it ushers in the spring."*

DONALD RAMSAY came home for his birthday, as he wished. Edith went to the station to meet him, while Mrs. Ramsay walked backwards and forwards in the drawing-room in a state of frightful excitement.

"Give me one glass, Nannie, or I shall break down. My own darling son! My favourite Donald! coming back to die! This the end of my ambition, the fruit of my sin, the work of my own hands! Give me the brandy, or I shall die!"

She stamped her foot on the floor, her fine person was drawn to its full height, her voice sounded loud in its tone of command, yet she quailed before the comparatively old and feeble servant.

"Sit ye doon, Mistress Ramsay; and no' call all the servin' lassies round ye wi' your din. I'll no' gie ye the cursed drink ony mair; it hae brought ruin to us a'; ye ken, I hae said, I'll never do it again. Gin auld Maisther Aleck Seton can gie up his drappie wine, or beer, for the sake o' the puir laddie that's comin' hame, ye sallna hae 't, ye daurna ask for it."

Mrs. Ramsay cowered down in an easy chair.

"You are right, Nannie; but I don't think I can bear to see him."

There was a noise of wheels stopping outside the garden.

"It's the twa bairns," said the old servant, trotting downstairs, her heart fluttering with sorrowful expectation.

It was not destined to be ill-placed; Donald was so weak, he was glad to lean on her arm after the greeting was over, and help to pull himself up by the balustrade.

“It will be a sorrowful coming of age, Nannie, to-morrow,” he said, as he paused for breath at the top of the staircase.

Nannie did not answer, but pushed open the drawing-room door.

“The mistress is waiting for ye, Maisther Donald.”

Donald entered, but threw up his arms with a cry ; she was waiting, still and motionless, but for the inarticulate sounds that were falling from distorted lips. A second stroke had fallen upon her. It was indeed a sorrowful coming of age. The glass that Nannie refused to give her might have delayed the attack until it was over, but it was bound to overtake the poor shattered body sooner or later. The end nevertheless was not yet. Edith, Nannie, Donald, as far as his strength allowed, tended her sick bed, which she never left again ; her mind was that of a little child.

“Are you my Donald ? my bonny, bonny

boy?" she would ask, peering into his face, as he sat holding her hand. "They told me my son was dead; but you are Donald, I am sure."

"Yes, mother, yes," he would answer, bending down to the face once more beautiful with the helplessness and innocence of imbecility; "I am your Donald, and I will never leave you again; we will keep together, may be to the end—I will not leave you, mother."

The two once gloriously beautiful heads made in the grand image of God, lay on the same pillow—the mother's shrunken fingers on the one hand that still retained a remnant of feeling, playing with his curls; while the hectic colour and shortening breath of the son told a tale of pitiful meaning that often sent Edith to her room to weep. Nannie bustled about, vainly endeavouring not to see a fate that she could do so little to avert. When the birds carolled among the trees and

shrubs below the Castle, the child spirit grew more and more meek and tender, and the proud heart of youth beat in unfeigned submission to an inevitable lot. Then the third call came to Mrs. Ramsay, and all was soon over. The brother and sister stood side by side watching, while Uncle Aleck ordered the funeral ceremonies, and followed their mother's body to its last home beside her husband. Donald was unable to attend; the bitter east wind, with its dash of searching north, seemed to pierce him through and through, and find him out even in the deepest recesses of a warm Scotch home, in spite of all the precautions used by his nurses. Edith saw a warmer climate must be sought, even if it were but for him to reach it and die. Donald acquiesced in all, without opposition, but without joy. He consented to go abroad, to be ready for the next winter in the south of France; and the Priory was let for a term of three years, thus adding to

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their income, and freeing them from a double expense.

Another long letter from Maggie to Donald came to relieve the silence of the dreary weeks following Mrs. Ramsay's death and their departure for the Continent. He read it aloud, without even a preparatory glance over its contents—there could be no secrets now between brother and sister.

“Thornbush.

“MY DEAR FRIEND,—

“At last the great wish of my heart has been fulfilled: you have of your own free will given up the use of alcohol, the curse of England, the bane of millions. I could fill volumes with stories of the mischief it works here, and is working, only among the people of this parish, but they are too many to particularise; only one that nearly concerns us both I will relate. But first, let me turn to a happier subject, and finish off

the romance of the Italian sailor, Johnnie, and his Madonna. You do not forget his devotion to her on the voyage; but I forget if I told you she had set up a millinery business, and was doing well—gaining a good living for herself and her children on capital which Johnnie advanced, and she was rapidly repaying. Only a week ago I met them arm-in-arm in Melbourne, and stopped to speak. Mrs. Simmonds blushed up to her eyes, and left her companion to explain. Johnnie, in a full suit of glossy black, looked entirely the gentleman; his handsome face expanded into the genuine Italian smile, and with eyes radiant with delight he was ready enough to take up his parable.

“‘My king is no longer kept out of his capital,’ he began, grandiloquently; ‘my country is a united Italy; we have freedom over all our beautiful land. Why should I live longer in exile? My heart rejoices, and yearns for the vine and fig-tree of my paternal

roof. But there is a strong claim upon it, more powerful even than home and country. I hear the good news in England, and yet I return again to Australia.'

"Here he looked at me, with his white teeth gleaming under his moustache.

" 'I understand,' I said; 'you came because you could not help yourself.'

" 'That is it, Signorita; Madonna guided me, like Beatrice to Dante, she is my star.'

" 'And you,' I said to Mrs. Simmonds, 'have consented to become Signora—?'

" 'Bianco,' she answered, shyly, 'and to go to Italy with him; we are to be married tomorrow in the English Church, and afterwards at the Roman Catholic.'

" 'You will be doubly bound by sacred vows to make her happy, Signor Bianco,' I replied.

" 'Yes, yes, two strong anchors instead of one, and the little anchor of love deep down in my heart here, firmer than both the other two.'

“He put his hand to his bosom with dramatic fervour, and his great warm eyes seemed ready to swallow up the object of his adoration, who scarcely knew how to carry off such an amount of demonstrative affection.

“ ‘Where are you thinking of living?’

“ ‘In Naples. I will take a house on the Chiaja, and my wife shall keep a *pension* for her country people to come to; we shall see you, perhaps, one day, Signorita, and then later we shall be rich enough to have an hotel. I can speak English.’

“ ‘It sounds an excellent plan,’ I said. ‘May I come and see you married, Mrs. Simmonds?’

“ ‘Do come,’ she answered, much pleased; ‘I was thinking of paying you a visit, to take leave, but—I was afraid you would think me foolish to marry again, with my large family of six children.’

“ ‘Not at all, where you have the prospect of giving them a father who has already

proved his kindness of heart in so many ways. I think you are a lucky woman.'

"Next morning I went, and witnessed the wedding, carrying a beautiful bouquet with me for the bride, who looked charmingly as Signora Giovanni Bianco. Indeed, the remark was general, what a handsome couple they made. She promised to write, and tell me how they got on in Naples. He works his way back to England as a sailor, and thence they will start for Italy.

"I was on my way to the train, when, to my extreme annoyance, I encountered Mr. Carmichael at the station, and he saw me.

"'Good morning, Miss Græme; I am indeed very glad to meet you. Deuced unpleasant business this, your having to leave Captain Woodward's; heard all about it when we came back the other day—M— and I—from the Fiji Islands. Deuced queer places they are—pretty girls, plenty of pigs, and cocoa nuts.'

“I saw he was far from sober, and said—

“‘I must go and get my ticket, Mr. Carmichael; the train starts soon.’

“‘Never mind the train, I’ll take a carriage and drive you out to Thornbush—nothing to me, you know; I want a talk with you, Miss Maggie.’

“‘I am very sorry; you must excuse me—’

“‘No, no. Here, cabby!’ he whistled, and up came at least three vehicles.

“‘Get in,’ he said, opening the door.

“‘I am going by train, Mr. Carmichael,’ I answered decidedly; ‘you had better go home.’

“‘Oh! never mind then; lady prefers the train.’ He threw the man a shilling, and followed me to the ticket office. ‘First-class, of course; such a deuced handsome girl as you ought not to go any how else.’

“‘Indeed, I think a lady is far safer with

second, or even third-class, passengers,' I replied; but he would take no hint.

" 'Two first for Thornbush.'

"The man gave him the tickets, looked at him with a leer, and then at me. I debated whether to call a policeman, but dreaded the *fracas*. There were only strange men on the platform. I walked to a second-class carriage.

" 'I must bid you good morning, Mr. Carmichael; I get in here.'

" 'Oh! very well, I'm not particular,' and he opened the door.

" 'I prefer going by myself.'

" 'You are very odd,' he said: 'I wanted to tell you how sorry I am about that fool of a woman, Mrs. Woodward, treating you so confoundedly ill.'

"The guard came up.

" 'Take your seat, miss. Time's up, sir.'

"I jumped in, the guard shut the door, the train moved off, and I congratulated

myself on being quit of Mr. Harry Carmichael. My thoughts went back to the old days at Burn Loupit, recalled by the sight of an Edinburgh man, sad representative of them as he presented with his fat, flushed face and unwieldy person. He looks thirty, or more; coarse and vulgar beyond description; loudly dressed, while his language is far more highly garnished than I give it. I must say I felt thankful he was not in Scotland, although I think few would tolerate him as he is now. Judge of my horror, when the train stopped at Thornbush, at finding him already on the station; he jumped into the guard's van. There is a car which takes passengers to the village; I felt tempted to get up, but felt convinced he would follow. It seemed better to walk over a bit of open common, and face the ordeal of a *tête-à-tête*, than subject myself to the gossip which would ensue if he talked to me on the public conveyance. He joined me at once.

“ ‘Deuced queer our coming in separate carriages. Which way do you go? You are living at the parson’s, aren’t you?’

“ ‘Yes.’

“ ‘Do you like that? Rather a bore, isn’t it, being with a straight-laced white choker?’

“ ‘Not at all; Mr. Mauleverer is a very clever, agreeable man.’

“ ‘I’ve no doubt he is very glad to have you with him, a very clever agreeable girl.’ His horrid smile, which was intended to be complimentary, made me rabid; I strode on, railroad pace. ‘You need not be in such a deuced hurry, my dear creature; I wanted to say—’

“ ‘I shall be late for dinner,’ I interrupted; ‘you will lose yours.’

“ ‘Never mind the dinner, I wanted to say—’

“ ‘How long do you remain in Melbourne?’ I asked in desperation.

“ ‘That depends; not a bad place, only a

fellow wants a wife to give a position, you know—get him admitted into ladies' society.'

" 'I never before heard of the wife giving the position, Mr. Carmichael.'

" 'I've been a bit fast, you see ; time come to settle down now. A good wife would set me straight. I've plenty of money, you know ; lots of girls would jump at me out here ; but I don't fancy them, compared with you.' "

Donald went on, but it was with difficulty ; disgust prompted him to tear the letter in pieces.

"Let me know the end," Edith said ; "what a wretch the fellow must have become ! I almost wonder Maggie could write it."

"It is for my edification," Donald answered hurriedly. "I deserve it, having made such a man my friend. You read the rest, Edith."

She took the letter from his hand, which

trembled visibly; any emotion now upset him.

“ ‘ I think you had far better return home, Mr. Carmichael.’

“ ‘ Wouldn’t you like to go, too, Maggie? People say Donald Ramsay was in love with you, but there’s no chance of him now; you had better take me instead.’

“ ‘ I really cannot undertake to give you a position, Mr. Carmichael, least of all in Edinburgh.’

“ ‘ Well, out here, then. You would be quite a lady in Australia, Maggie; they are not like those we have at home.’

“ ‘ I hope I am a lady anywhere,’ I answered, ‘ as far as education and conduct are concerned. If not high born, at least I have too much pride to be ashamed of my dear father and mother, or of their position. I do not think they would feel flattered by your offer.’

“‘Deuce take it ! what do you expect ?’

“He stopped, and looked insolently at me.

“‘ Something above you, Mr. Carmichael ; at least a man whom I should not blush to face my honest parents with, or to ask them to receive as a son-in-law. You have my answer. I request you to go back and leave me.’

“‘ Stop, stop, Maggie ! you are in such a deuced hurry.’

“He raised his hand to his forehead, and looked all at once so bewildered and stupid, I feared he was going to be ill. At that moment, to my intense relief, I saw Mr. Mauleverer coming out of a house not far off. He saw us ; I made him a signal, and a few strides of his long legs brought him to the rescue. He raised his hat, but the next moment took in the real state of affairs.

“‘ I cannot make this gentleman comprehend that I do not wish to accept the

honour of his hand.' I fear, for once in my life, I was sarcastic.

" 'No honour, honour all on my side, sir,' said the wretched fellow, with a foolish laugh. 'Deuced fine girl; don't think I could do better than marry her, do you?'

" 'You do not sufficiently recognise Miss Græme's position, Mr. Carmicheal. She is residing in my house, and I am responsible for her not being in any way annoyed. I must request you to turn back with me.'

"The bright youth demurred, but Mr. Mauleverer put his arm firmly into his. I said 'good morning,' and went off as fast as my legs would carry me, without doing anything so undignified as running. I hope he will be shipped off home; it is certain ruin if he stay here. I doubt if even that remedy be not too late. When out of sight I sat down, and realised I was both nervous and frightened. My resting-place looked like a ruined garden—a tangle of long grass, roses,

and lovely lilac and scarlet sarsaparilla. It spoke of some former home deserted, some human story brought to an end. My mind instinctively recurred to the ruin of a human soul, such as I had just quitted. I had a good cry. How thankful women ought to be to have that solace allowed them. Scarcely were the traces of my tears wiped away when Mr. Mauleverer returned.

“‘I fear you have been very much annoyed,’ he said, kindly; ‘but I hope I have made it clear to Mr. Carmichael that any further attempt will be of no use, if it be possible to impress anything on a man in his state of mind and body. I sent him back to Melbourne in an empty carriage which happened to be passing. What a specimen he is.’

“‘Don’t talk about him,’ was all I could say. Mr. Mauleverer sat for some minutes silent, then he said—

“‘Do you know the history of this ruin?’

“ ‘No, I have often thought there must be one.

“ ‘Some years ago an old man lived here, of whom nothing was known, except that he made money during the first rush of the gold-fields in Australia. He was not married when he built this house, one of the finest here at that time. His neighbour, a poor day labourer, worked as a mason, and helped in the erection. He had a handsome daughter, engaged to a young fellow, also a mason, living in the village. The old man asked her to be his wife, tempting her with the riches he would leave her at his death. She yielded, and they were married. She was indulged in every way—she had fine clothes, money and jewellery; but she was miserable, and they led an unhappy life. Her temper, never good, grew violent. She was known to meet her lover in secret. One day the husband and wife had a more serious quarrel than usual. On her return, he tried to pro-

pitiate her by the present of a magnificent brooch. She accepted it graciously ; a neighbour was witness to the transaction, and left them sitting down to tea, apparently reconciled. It was their custom to drink toddy every night, often a good deal more than was good for either of them, to benumb their sense of unhappiness. She was last seen by a passing traveller, through the open window, mixing the grog at the table, the old man crouching over the fire. Next morning the blinds were down and remained so all day ; no one appeared. The second day the neighbours became suspicious, and tried the door ; it was locked. Getting through a back window, they found the hearthstone raised, a pick standing by the fireplace, a small hole empty. It was the place where the old man hoarded his gold.'

“ ‘ And he himself ? ’

“ ‘ Was found lying dead on his bed, poisoned. He died with marks of evident

agony—alone, unbefriended. Not a neighbour heard his cries; they were too far away. The faithless wife disappeared with everything of value that could be carried off, and her lover was missing also. Neither have ever been heard of since, and the probability is they fled together. The pick was identified as one belonging to her father; but he was cleared from any suspicion of being implicated in the murder. The neighbours got it into their heads the place was haunted; declared they heard strange cries at night. No one would live in the house, and it was allowed to fall into ruin. Some of the materials were stolen away, and nothing remains but that bit of blackened masonry which denotes the forsaken hearth.'

“‘ I looked round, and an uncanny feeling crept over me, in spite of the bright sunshine and flowers; but I thought of the story, and not of Harry Carmichael. Strange things must have happened here in the early days

of the colony. Sometimes a whole family disappeared, no one knew whither ; if they were in debt, the bush was near—too wide a field for justice to pursue them. Sometimes a box would be given in charge, and never be reclaimed. I was present with Mr. Mauleverer at the opening of one, which had not been touched for twenty years. We all stood round in great excitement, hoping for a mystery. The lock was forced ; only a few shirts in excellent condition, some towels, a couple of pistols, rewarded our curiosity, until we came to a small tin box. When opened, a dark powder fell out. We all rushed away, and stood in the road in dire convulsions, unable to speak, just able to stand, sneezing as if for our lives. The dark powder was snuff, as good as when bought at the tobacconist's. With that unromantic story I must end my letter. Let me add that my sweet old man and I are growing fast friends. He lets me read to him, and allowed

Mr. Mauleverer to call with me. Mrs. Mauleverer is vastly improved in health. I hope the pattering of little feet, and the sound of baby tones, will not be long in coming. I am to be god-mother. I earn a pound a week by taking two little girls for about four hours every morning, the children of one of the most influential members of the Victorian Parliament. As I am not allowed to pay anything for my board and lodgings, I am comparatively rich again, and do not care to make other arrangements until Mrs. Mauleverer is thoroughly well and strong. As a resident governess, I am told I can command sixty or eighty pounds per annum, and up country a hundred; but my want of musical knowledge of any kind is a great hindrance. Every girl is expected, by fond parents, to make a noise, if she cannot do anything else, on the piano. Mrs. Woodward has another little boy. She never speaks to me; the children, I hear, are not

happy at school. Captain Woodward talks of throwing up his appointment and returning to England.

“Your sincere friend,

“MAGGIE.”

Edith folded the letter and placed herself behind Donald's chair, with her arms round his neck. He put up his face to hers.

“It is better to die than to live like Harry Carmichael,” he said, “I have been kept from ruining God's image entirely and being a foul blot on the face of His creation. I am thankful, Edith ; I do not repine.”

The eyes so full of sorrow went to her heart, but it was the sorrow of a chastened, repentant child, no longer unsubdued and angry.

CHAPTER XI.

" O pitiful ! O sad ! O tearful helpless age,
How shall we trace the memories drear, how read the blotted
page ?
Can this be all I keep of child, and youth, and man ?
Is this the end of all my being's wondrous plan ?
Thy servant busied here and there, forgot
The treasure given in charge, and it is not."

EDITH and Donald sat in the drawing-room of the Priory the day following the receipt of Maggie's letter ; everything of beauty or value had been packed away ; nothing relieved the bare monotony of mahogany ; chairs, and tables, and carpets, alone remained for the incoming tenants. The sense of a new scene in the drama of life beginning, lay on the souls of both ; those which had been already played, were not of a complexion to inspire either brother or sister with much hope for those which were to follow. They were unusually silent ; a ring at the door bell seemed a welcome break. A step was

heard on the stairs, but when the door opened, both rose simultaneously ; it was Montague Dewar. For a few moments all three stood confronting each other with embarrassed looks. Their visitor was the first to speak.

“ I am going a long journey,” he said at last, “ perhaps I may never see you again. I feel compelled to come and speak with you once more ; to say at least one word in token of the sympathy I have with your sorrow.”

Donald answered—

“ It was kind of you to remember us, will you be long away ; longer than we shall ? ”

“ I cannot tell exactly, some months, a year may be. I may never return to Edinburgh again.”

His eyes involuntarily sought Edith's, but the long lashes had fallen over her cheeks, and she stood leaning heavily against the mantelpiece. Her dark mourning dress made her look if anything more touchingly

womanly and beautiful than ever ; the sad expression round the mouth had deepened, giving more intensity to her naturally pensive cast of countenance. Like the Cenci, she looked on the verge of tears, as if a finger held up would bid the flood burst forth ; yet she had not lost self-control, with all the trials that had rolled over her since she and her lover last met in that room. Stretching out her hand to Montague, she looked full into his face, and the earnest truthful eyes told him her heart still beat in unison with her old feeling towards him.

“ I wish you a happy summer,” she said. The words were simple enough in themselves, but her manner satisfied him he had not studied it for months in vain.

“ It will not be that,” he answered, “ happiness (in the ordinary sense of the word) and I have long been strangers. I only remember one short spell of it all my life.”

Edith did not answer, and neither recol-

lected he had not been asked to sit down. Donald apologised.

"I did not notice it," Montague replied, "we do not need to stand upon ceremony, Donald, that is past for all of us. You are going to seek health, I—," he stopped suddenly, "I came to ask if I may be numbered among your friends once more. This life is too short for those who do love and value each other's friendship, to live entirely like strangers. Am I presuming on too much?" He had turned to Edith.

"No," she answered, "I have long wished it, my mother—"

"Sees perhaps with other eyes, now," he said musingly, supplying the end of the sentence for her. "We may meet again, then, as in the days of our early acquaintance, if we meet at all; you are willing it should be so, Miss Ramsay?"

"Quite," was Edith's short answer. This visit was trying to both nerve and heart.

Donald murmured out a few words of thanks for his many kindnesses, and for coming to them at all after what had passed.

"It could not be helped, no one was to blame," Montague said with his fine tact. "I, perhaps, most of all, in the first instance, a man is only a short sighted creature, acting from the best of motives. No thanks, I cannot stay," with so long a look at Edith that she crimsoned under his gaze. Perfectly oblivious he was all the while holding her hand grasped in both his, he broke away, with a hurried "Farewell" to each, and left them. Short as the visit had been, the sight of him again in their house seemed like a herald of rest and comfort to Edith; the knowledge and certainty that in the future, however far off, he was to come in and out, as in the old happier days gave her a sense of tranquil happiness. If he never asked her to be his wife, the daily sight of his face, the sound of his quiet voice, the enjoyment of his society

would be hers, and at present that seemed more than enough.

* * * * *

Edith and Donald travelled by easy stages to Zermatt. On the balcony in front of the Riffelberg, the brother and sister are taking in the glory of an alpine sunset over the long chain of the Pennine Alps, and the grand glacier that stretches its icy fingers down the green pastures above Zermatt. Those who have travelled to the scene need no description, and for those who have not, words are impotent to paint its beauty and grandeur. Let them go and see it for themselves. Donald has rallied far beyond his own and others' hopes, but his hold on life is guaranteed only by the remnant of one lung, and a heart weakened and uncertain in its action. There is no craving for the cursed stimulant; absolute abstention has given the poison time and means to work itself out of the

system ; the body is a wreck, but the blood left is pure and wholesome, as it mostly is when Nature has the management of her own, the brain cannot work long, but when it does, the labour done is good and sound. A number of " Magnus " lies open on the bench beside him, a powerful article, where his own sad experience comes into play, bears the signature of his youthful days. Willie has the first chapters also of a new serial in it. He and Nellie are going to pay them a flying visit in a few days, bride and bridegroom, on their way to Gratz and Salzburg. Nellie has had a picture in the Scotch Academy for two successive years ; this season, one has been favourably noticed in London. They are as busy as bees, and happy in proportion ; their honeymoon is no idle time : let us hope its sweetness will be more than usually prolonged. There is no opportunity for it to pall on the matrimonial palate.

Donald's eyes are resting on the Abendroth.

Is he thinking of the sunset of life? His own, so pale and grey in comparison with this? If Maggie were there, something like a glow would spread over it, but he dare not ask her to come. She has found her work in a distant hemisphere; she is useful, beloved, and happy; why should she be otherwise? She never promised herself to him at his best, he could not ask her to share his remnant of existence now. For the first time since her departure a mail has come and brought no letter, either for her parents, for Edith, or for him. Edith knows very well he is fidgetting and worrying in his secret heart about it.

“There are new arrivals,” she said, as a group of tourists and guides detaches itself from the wood, through which the path is made from Zermatt.

“Ham and eggs—tea and toast,” said Donald, impatiently; “not one, I venture to say, will come here first, to see the feast

Nature has provided for them, and which will be gone before they have done gorging."

But he was mistaken. A tall Englishman, quiet at first, and staid, who they subsequently found had climbed almost every peak above ten thousand feet in that glorious range, opened the door leading on to the balcony, and, with a slight bow to Edith, stood silently surveying the panorama before him.

Apparently, he became so absorbed that he forgot he was not alone. A verse of a psalm fell from his lips, muttered in a low voice at intervals.

Donald's cough roused him. Then he turned round, and looked from one to the other, with an expression that seemed to take in the situation at a glance—

"I hope I do not intrude, although I know this balcony is public property," he said.

Donald thought of his words—

“ Only you, apparently, have taken advantage of the view it offers,” he answered.

“ May I ask if your name is Ramsay ?” said the stranger, diving into his breast pocket ; “ whilst asking after my own letters at the Zermatt Post-office, I offered to bring up any that might have arrived for people here. I am always glad to get my letters.”

“ Thanks,” replied Donald, his face flushing for a moment with the delusive hue of health ; “ it is one I have been anxiously expecting. It was most kind of you to bring it up.”

“ Are you right in sitting out later ?” the stranger asked. “ With the treat of a welcome letter, cannot you afford to be prudent, and enjoy it under shelter ? The glory has almost gone, and I am hungry.”

“ But, nevertheless, you came to feed your heart with beauty before feasting the body,” Donald said, gaily.

“Nay, nay, don’t give me credit for romance alone,” the stranger answered, his face full of sly fun; “my orders on arrival are concise, and generally given as I go through the passage, to where I know, or guess the best view is to be had: ‘Anything you have in the house ready for when I come in again—the very best you can give me, if possible.’ In that way I avoid the time lost in ordering improbabilities, if not impossibilities, and I soothe myself with a good view, instead of kicking my heels and losing my patience in a musty saloon. I am very mortal, apt to be cross when hungry, thin-skinned and suspicious also.”

Edith laughed, his genial face so thoroughly belied the character he gave of himself. He held the door open with a gesture of respectful courtesy as she passed in, and then allowed Donald to do the same to him, as the elder man. They found there were two letters from Maggie—one for

Donald and one for Edith enclosed, as usual. Hers was so long, she left it until his was read, as it bore a later date. Donald's was a short apology for losing the previous mail, the reason for which, she told him, Edith's letter would explain:—

“Thornbush,

“DEAR EDITH,—

“My hands are so full, I must keep up my correspondence this time journal fashion.

“When I last wrote, I was in good hope about Mrs. Mauleverer. There has been a terrible disappointment for them both. He was taking her a drive in their new buggy, when the horse, until then a pattern of steadiness, took fright, ran away, pitched Mr. Mauleverer out, but was fortunately stopped before she suffered a like fate. He escaped unhurt, but the shock was too much for her. Baby was born next day, but only breathed

once or twice. It went near costing the mother her life. I never saw a man more dejected; had not the drives been expressly ordered for her, I think he would never have forgiven himself. The death of his child seems to have completely changed his nature.

“It was fortunate some one was near to nurse her. I am as fond of her now as if she were the sister I always longed to possess, and he is just like a brother. But this is not what I most long to tell. You are the safest depositary of what I feel I must share with some one. It is no breach of confidence, with your promise of silence. Is this good arguing or not? I am not sure. Again promise me, both of you, never to tell. My sweet old man has been increasingly weak and ailing. He began, as I told you, to flag last December; twice I have had to go to the bank for his remittances. He would not hear of any one else doing it, and even hinted he

might ask me to write his next letter to England, to acknowledge the last, when I put it into his hands. I had intended spending the evening with him, but the letter looked a long one, and I thought he might prefer being alone.

“He heard the noise of the latch being lifted, and said—

“‘Don’t leave me, child.’

“So I stood picking off the dead leaves of the geraniums until he had finished. Then he laid it down with a sigh; but I saw it was one of relief.

“‘It is well, very well, Maggie. Come and sit here; I want to talk to you. Have you ever been in Wales? No? But you come from Scotland, and know what the pleasure is of watching blue hills, and the clouds, travelling like messengers from one to another, rolling on, making nothing of the vast hollows and fissures that take men hours to cross and fathom. You have seen green

laps of verdure between the lower knolls, where the cattle graze on the short sweet grass, and the flowers make God's garden beautiful; where, perhaps, some still mountain tarn reflects them on its bosom, or the wide glorious sea creeps up the golden reaches of sand, and pours out its swelling tide to the foot of rugged, rocky ranges.'

"His lips seemed to be drawing a picture from memory; his gaze became perfectly abstracted from the present.

"I did not interrupt him, even by assent. He went on—

" ' When a fine mansion rears its ancient turrets over the woods, and from its terrace the owner looks round, and says—" All this beauty is mine—rich pastures and pleasant cots, snug farm-houses and ancestral woods, are mine to do with according to my will; the game is mine to hunt and shoot; the rivers mine to fish; the soil my own to keep

or alienate"—this is enough to make a man proud, and hard, and self-willed, and inconsiderate. He flies in the face of contradiction, and will hear neither rhyme nor reason. Is it wonderful God crosses him? denies him a child of his own loins? sends him to a distant, despised branch of his family to seek an heir? And the boy he finds—bred up in decent poverty, full of life and spirit, learns soon enough how to forget his former innocence, and to squander his sudden riches right and left; there are plenty ready to teach him. He is far from his mother's law of love—his father's pious precepts. They may come back in after years, but late—too late. What is a growing lad without woman's fostering care? What are rank, and title, and fortune, without her gentle restraint and powerful moral teaching? A man's fierce nature alone to train a boy, with no influence but that of worldly wisdom—no creed beyond that of unbounded selfish indulgence—no

example but one of open vice. Oh! mother, you had better have buried your boy in the quiet grave, than have wept tears of joy because such a man had sought him, and made him heir to rank and riches.'

"His eye suddenly rested on me; I had stolen to a seat beside him, and taken one of his hands in mine. He was so lonely there, out in the strange land. I felt he was dreaming aloud of days gone by, and I must comfort him.

"'Yes, Maggie, I was that boy, and this is the end; but a long story lies between of guilt and sorrow. It was a hard road to travel, and my heart rejoices that I can tread it no more! The burthen and heat of the day! Sweltering, still, hopeless, like burning summer noons beneath the heated rocks, where the hot wind blows like a furnace. Ah! for wings to take the toiler up to the breezy heights, where the cool air fans his brow, and the lark soars and carols in his

gladness—where the bee sucks honey from the mountain flowers, and the sailing ships pass far below, like winged messengers from land to land. There is toil, toil, before they can be reached ; stony paths, and slippery crags, and treacherous bogs, and the burning sun beating down upon his head ; and the brow is wet with sweat, the heart pants, and the knees fail ! Oh ! weary, weary life ! ’

“ His head sunk on his bosom. I knew it was his own hard lot he was shadowing forth.

“ I sat still, almost breathless, till he began again—

“ ‘ One day, the hard, cruel man and I came to hard, cruel words, Maggie. I was proud, and wild, and passionate—already the purity of youth was soiled ; high living, hard drinking, and evil men had done their worst. There was no sin I had not committed except one. I had never misled the innocent. He

had no conscience—no law. I respected my mother in every unstained woman ; but gambling, racing, yachting, sport, the world, the devil's ways, cost money. He did not mind my being wicked, but he grumbled at the cost. I was cut down in my allowance ; debts were pressing upon me—loans at enormous interest ; my future prospects mortgaged—nothing brought relief. Then, for a few short months, I was happy. A fair young creature crossed my path ; I loved her, and, in spite of all my faults and follies, she loved me. She was noble, and rich, and good. A little child blessed our hearth, and the old man was pleased ; but the demon of debt was only stayed, the myrmidons of lucre were pressing round me, and I dared not tell him or her. In an evil hour I was tempted to forge his name ; yes child,' he said, as I involuntarily started, 'take your hands away from mine—it is that of a felon. See, here are the marks of galling chains, that eat into

the heart as well as into the outer flesh. I am, in the sight of man, a disgrace—a blot on the face of creation. In the sight of God, perhaps, one bidden not altogether to despair of infinite love and mercy. What, Maggie ! Do you still keep my hand ? Do you yet feel compassion for the sinner ?’

“I had drawn his hand to my lips, and kissed the dull red mark.

“‘Not there, dear child ! not the mark of my sin.’

“‘It is no longer the mark of sin, but the sign of its punishment,’ I said ; ‘and punishment makes pure.’

“‘But it is long and bitter, Maggie ! What did I not go through in the discovery ? Prison, disgrace, the rage of the old man, were nothing to her sorrow. It killed her ; she died of a broken heart. I saw my boy no more. Long years of hard labour in the penal settlements, labour in the pearl fisheries, labour on the roads, till my hair grew grey,

and the weary years had turned life's summer into autumn. It is bad enough for those born and bred in vice and hardship, but to the carefully tended, the highly nurtured—O! child, death were merciful in comparison! Yet in the bitter cup one drop of comfort was left, and I was to taste it after years of thirst. My boy, kept in ignorance of his father's fate, until the chance word of a spiteful schoolmate revealed the truth, went to the fearful old man, his guardian in conjunction with my wife's brother, and stood up in the fearless courage of boyhood. "I have a father, he is poor and sorrowful; you have dared to keep me in ignorance of his fate. I am going to him; no human power shall stop me." And my brave boy was disinherited, and came and worked with me.'

"Here he burst into a sudden passion of tears, which many minutes did not suffice to calm.

"Then once more I believed in God and

endless love ; and my heart grew soft and gentle, like that of a little child. He was like his mother ; his uncle had brought him up, and kept him from evil. He would have stayed with me always, but he had talents beyond the average of boys, and I could not let him waste his life with me, although I was once more free. I sent him back to England ; bade him reclaim his father's name, and make it honourable among his fellows. And he has done it, and yet cherishes his old convict father. Only to you, child, have I told my story, for his sake. Every year he sends me more than enough to live on, only on condition that I would share his mother's fortune would he leave me. More than once has he come half the world's distance to see me ! And now, Maggie, God has given him his reward. Goodness has conquered evil. His old relation, my tempter, my ruin, on his death-bed made restitution ; and my boy owns the fair heritage I once thought would

be mine. He says it is mine now, and is coming to fetch me, Maggie. He will own his convict father before a world.'

"The old man sank back in his chair, overcome with emotion and the effort of speaking so long. There were yet points in the sad story not clear to me, but I did not like to press him with questions. At last, I ventured to say—

"'How came you here, dear sir?'

"'My son would not hear of leaving me in a convict settlement, and as I refused to return to England with him to raise the scandal of my crime again, and blur his success, we came to Melbourne and found this hut; the people who built it, at a time when there was nothing but forest near, had just died. My son bought it, and I shall never leave it again. Fifteen years he has never missed a mail in writing to me; and every quarter a remittance of money comes, and when others have travelled for

health and pleasure he has come over to see me. No one knows he has a father. Now he is rich he can assume the name Providence has allotted to him; the convict Meredith will be forgotten, and Lord Penmaen may lift his head among his peers, and face the proudest. Ah! Maggie, you will see him, and judge whether the old doting father has said too much about him. I shall not return to my beloved Canaan; the old sinners died in the wilderness, but their children entered in.'

"His eyes fixed on the bare rafters of the hut, whence a glint of the blue Australian sky peeped down on the descendant of an ancient British line. He seemed so lost in reverie, I felt half afraid lest joy had been too much for him who had known little else than sorrow.

"'Lord Penmaen will scarcely like to see your roof in that condition, sir,' I said, not liking to address him by either name.

“‘It will last my time and longer, Maggie ; the Australian robins have made it their home, and I have not had the heart to turn them out. Only sixty-five winters have gone over my head, but sorrow and labour have whitened it with the snows of eighty, and my years will not be many.’

“‘Still it might vex your son to find it so,’ I said ; ‘he will not like to dwell in cedar, while you live unsheltered from the rain. I should like to get hold of a carpenter, and when the roof is repaired whitewash the ceiling and re-paper the walls. You have no idea how snug I could make the old hut look.’

“‘Do as you like, Maggie. He will be pleased to find you here ; it always distressed him to think I would insist on being alone. I did not want chattering magpies poking into my past ; ferreting out my history and his. I have told him you often came to visit me. I made a little sketch of you in

words, the first day you peeped into the garden with your pupils. Ah ! Maggie, old men harbour strange fancies ; their brains like to weave plans and settle schemes, and if they do not come to pass no harm is done, child, by our airy day-dreams. Do as you like.'

"With this permission, you will not wonder that I set to work without delay, in anticipation of his lordship's appearance. I confess the thought of welcoming this son, than whom, allowing for a parent's partiality, no more dutiful child could be found, gave a spur to my ideas, and quickened my fingers."

Edith glanced at Donald ; he had shaded his face, and she could not see it.

"I went to the workmen, who were far too curious to get inside the house to be long in coming. Their part finished, I made a journey to Melbourne, and chose papers, and pretty chintzes and carpets. The garden is always attractive, with a sort of wild

loveliness; the porch was repainted, the doors and windows also. The old man's bedroom I took especial pains with. It is the same size as the only parlour; a second room, with a lean-to roof, which has done service as a kitchen, has been prepared for Lord Penmaen's use. I devoutly hope he will bring no valet, or he will have to sleep in what was once a pigstye; and that no valet's dignity would survive. This pattern son has hitherto slept on a sofa in the parlour, refusing to leave his father for a moment when his rare visits took place, and then the lean-to was his dressing-room. No wonder in my excitement and bustle, I let the mail go, and found it was too late to send this budget. I told the Mauleverers they were not to ask me questions: they laugh at me, and call me Mrs. Cartwright, but forbear like true friends to press me on the subject. They are so much happier; she and I learn daily from him, for I have seldom met a man

more full of information and with equal tact in imparting it to others ; while he treats her with a tender reverence, since the loss of their little one, which is touching. His parishioners were a little afraid of him, but his fatherhood, though it lasted so short a time, seemed to bring him to their level ; and now he is universally beloved. I shall direct this to Zermatt, and my next also ; then this son will have arrived ! What will be the future of my dear old man ? I do not believe he will die. He seemed to revive as the house grew prettier, and at last he took a lively interest in it, and would watch me for hours as I sat cutting and contriving with needle and scissors. I have written none of this to Donald, but you will read it all to him.

“ Your affectionate,

“ MAGGIE.”

Edith folded the letter, and looked up. Donald had walked to the window ; his eyes

were riveted on the mountains, clad in the ashen garb of coming darkness, but his thoughts seemed far away. Edith laid her hand on his shoulder.

“Maggie will not marry the old man, Donald.”

“No, but the son may marry her, Edith.”

“I never thought of that,” she answered ; and all night long her dreams were of rose covered porches, and a tall man beneath it, whose face she tried to see, but it always escaped her ; and she only knew Maggie was with him, with pleased looks and gladdening smiles. An old man pottered in a garden near, and watched them with furtive looks, but his face she had forgotten also when morning came. Maggie alone stood out in memory, fresh and fair, as when she sang to Donald in the dell at Loch Lomond.

Poor Donald ! He had not slept all night, and when he came down next day looked wretched and ill beyond description.

CHAPTER XII.

GAUNT. "What is six winters? They are quickly gone.

BOLING. To men in joy; but grief makes one hour ten."

DONALD's dejection of countenance, and his spiritless manner did not escape the stranger's observation, when he came back from his day's ramble the next evening.

"Is there anything particularly troubling his mind?" he asked kindly of Edith, when Donald quitted the balcony for a few minutes.

"Yes."

"That letter?"

"Contained disquieting news."

"And I brought it; will the next set things right?"

"Perhaps—but it may only confirm what he fears."

"Has he any pursuit at this present moment, which would be likely to interest him—reading, music, writing?"

"This is his," said Edith, finding his paper in "Magnus."

"Indeed!" said the stranger, lifting his eyebrows, and, sitting down, he read it attentively. Donald came back some time before he had finished.

"Why did you not tell me you were an author, and one of 'Magnus's' staff, Mr. Ramsay? We are brother craftsmen; but I am one of that doomed class, an unfortunate Editor as well. Can't you help a lame dog over the stile, and give me a paper within the next two weeks? You will find yourself in honourable company."

He handed Donald his card, and the current number of a well-known periodical.

"I am much obliged by your asking me, Mr. Balfour," Donald answered; "but—"

"It's no kindness on my part; I am asking a favour of you; I am in downright need of help just now; I want a certain amount of manuscript, which I promised to supply

myself—but the press of work has been so great the last six years, I feel utterly disinclined to put pen to paper. My brain wants absolute rest, unless I mean to break down altogether and bring up my thinking machine with a run. Give me a paper on some cognate subject to this and I will pay you what you like to ask.”

Donald’s face brightened.

“Don’t labour at it; I’ll give you three weeks if a fortnight is too short, for I want to tempt you and your sister to join me in some easy expeditions. I will not lead him into mischief,” he added, as Edith’s face showed evident anxiety. “I will remember he is not up to my style of Alpine work.”

So it came to pass, that during the next month, between intervals of writing with Donald, he and Edith, under Mr. Balfour’s guidance, threaded many of the lower passes in safety, and ventured up to heights where few so weak as Donald could have ventured

to go. They found they had many acquaintances in common, among others Montague Dewar; the discovery occurred as they stood together on the summit of the Monte Moro pass looking down into the glories of the Macugnaga valley, and on the rugged sides of Monte Rosa.

“Yes, I know him well,” Mr. Balfour said, looking at Edith with an expression of deep meaning; “he once drew a portrait in words for my especial benefit, and you are its counterpart in every respect.”

Edith coloured painfully, and the subject dropped. In this way the feverish anxiety of waiting, which Edith so much dreaded for Donald, became greatly lessened by the tact and thought of this new made friend. When Donald gave him the finished paper he read it attentively, and said, as he folded it up—

“You have a valuable gift for so young a

man, Mr. Ramsay, that of ripened experience."

"Dearly bought, and but little time left in which to use it," Donald answered somewhat sadly.

"The value of a life is not measured by its length," said Mr. Balfour; "the working days of the greatest of all men lasted only three years; the brightest have been meteor-like in duration."

"You wish to cheer me; I am grateful," Donald replied; "my fate is in wiser hands than my own, and I do not murmur."

"I am going down to look for letters; shall I bring yours or not?" There was a merry twinkle in his grey eyes.

"You need not trouble too much about it," Donald answered in the same voice; but he was not unmoved when Mr. Balfour brought the expected budget in Maggie's handwriting; he gave it to Edith.

“Read me yours ; I am a coward, I dare not open mine.”

“There is but one,” she answered, “addressed to both of us.”

“I thought as much,” he said ; “go on—”

“Thornbush, June.

“DEAR EDITH AND DONALD,

“I cannot write to both, and you, Donald, will see why your dear sister must have a share in this, before it is finished. Where did I leave off, about Lord Penmaen being expected ? One morsel of sad news first, not to interrupt my happier story. About a week ago Mr. Mauleverer said Captain Woodward told him that Harry Carmichael was beginning to be very strange, and since it has been confirmed. He had been drinking furiously ; the Governor forbade young M— having any more to do with him ; he has been getting worse from day to day, and this morning he was taken to the Yarra

Bend, a raving madman, there to await his father's directions concerning him. There is no hope of his ever recovering. Out of pure humanity I would go and see him, were it common illness and if I could do one atom of good, but it would be of no use. Now for less sorrowful tidings.

“As the time drew near for his son's arrival, Mr. Cartwright (he wishes to keep his assumed name) grew feverishly anxious, more fidgetty than any woman, lest something should occur to prevent it. I had a messenger engaged to let us know when the vessel was sighted; nothing would do but my going with him to the ship. He was, in fact, too excited to be allowed to venture alone; and the Mauleverers advised me not to leave him; the time of waiting would be lessened by his going to meet his son, and I consented. The train goes down to Hobson's Bay, and then we took a boat and hovered about until the ship anchored. It was a

splendid sight to see her come in ; her sails all set, flags flying before the breeze from every bit of space above the royals—bunting, in fact, everywhere. How well I remembered helping to make the flags before we landed, nineteen months ago!—what a world of events has happened since! I feel years older, and so sedate, that no situation seems out of place for me ; even waiting with one comparative stranger to welcome another. The old man peered over the bulwarks, and as the noble vessel swept to its moorings, I heard him scream, rather than say—

“ ‘There he is, that is my son, look Maggie!’—but my eyes were only sharpened by curiosity, and that was blind to what was plain enough for love to see. We were soon alongside, and, first of all, Mr. Cartwright was hoisted on board. I saw him clasped in the arms of a tall, upright man, who looked almost middle aged. It was not until I was

hoisted up myself that I could really see him, and find out that his face was not old.

“‘This is my little friend, David,’ Mr. Cartwright said, when I stepped on deck; ‘this is Miss Græme.’

“I don’t know what either can have thought of my manners, I was staring with wide open eyes—it was a face I knew perfectly well, unless my sight deceived me, or nature had played some prank, and cast two men in one mould. Lord Penmaen stood looking down at me, a little puzzled also.

“‘I have to thank you for so much kindness to my dear father,’ he said, taking both my hands; ‘nothing has given me so much comfort for years as to find some one besides myself had found a place in his heart. How did you manage it?’

“His gaze was so searching, I felt I should be sorry to be a criminal being cross-examined, but as there was no misdemeanour, I managed to look up at him, and say—

“‘It must have been my unbounded interest in him—your father’s is a countenance no one could pass without noticing—besides, his utter loneliness.’

“‘Yes, yes, I understand,’ he answered; ‘nevertheless, I thank you in my heart more warmly than I have words to express.’

“This was all said amid the din of voices, and the bustle of luggage being claimed and hauled to and fro. His modest belongings, directed David Cartwright, Esq., were soon ready. By this I knew he did not wish his rank to be known, and addressed him as Mr. Cartwright accordingly. When he helped me into the boat I found him having a second look at me, and I caught the old man giving a little chuckle of delight. Mr. Cartwright took the second oar, and we two sat opposite at the stern. Shall I take his portrait for you, dear Edith? I know, like a true woman, you crave every item of detail about this pattern—son. Hair iron grey—a great deal

too grey for his face, which, though thin, is not cadaverous, and has the colour of perfect health; a broad rather than high forehead, where brain power and perceptive ability seem harmoniously balanced. Don't you think I must have been studying Dr. Johnson to use all those long words so glibly? Deep grey eyes, which look through you; the sort of eyes no one would dream of telling a lie under, save in the teeth of the firmest conviction it would at once be found out; yet eyes that, when they mean to express kindness, do it in double measure. He is tall, as I said before, broad in the shoulder, and long in the limb; but the great charm of the man is his smile. It is quiet—perhaps more than a *little* sad, yet sunny as a beam, and lights up his whole countenance at once. I should not call his nose altogether handsome, but it is not self-assertive like a Roman's, nor sensitive like a Greek's, nor vulgar like a pug, nor is it a Paul Pry's; it is good enough, and one

doesn't, in fact, think about it. He never seems to be trying to be polite, yet his courtesy of manner is indubitable. It strikes one as arising from a thorough appreciation of all women; of admiration for those that are worthy of it, and compassionate kindness for those who are not. His hands are as brown as a berry, but have the make and the shape of those of a gentleman.

"We were fortunate enough to secure a carriage to ourselves in the train; he sat down opposite his father, and placed his hands on the old man's knees.

" 'I debated, father, whether I should come as Lord Penmaen, with the full complement of luggage and valet, send for you at once to an hotel, and carry you back in state to England; but your determination to end your days here seemed to say you would rather I came quietly. I already begin to loath the respect paid to my title; and the ignorant love to ferret out mysteries.'

“ ‘ Yes, David, yes ; I shall never return to England ; as long as I have my son’s love, I am willing to bear banishment to the end. I crave nothing beyond your happiness.’ ”

“ ‘ And that father, as far as a human soul dare count on it, is assured. You see, Miss Græme, we have no secrets from you ; my father tells me you know all.’ ”

“ ‘ And you do not object to his trusting a comparative stranger ?’ ”

“ ‘ You are something more than that, now, after all these months of kindness,’ he answered, ‘ that is time enough for acquaintance with a character without artifice, or concealment of any kind.’ ”

“ Again the searching look met mine.

“ The drive from the station at Melbourne was delicious with those two happy people. Our winter rains have set in, they last for days, and come down in torrents. Then we have magnificent blue skies, and fleecy clouds. The dust is laid, vegetation revived, every

corner is green with the fresh springing grass, and the flowers make the pastures look like gardens. The atmosphere is perfect, existence itself is a delight. As we left the streets and suburbs behind us, the beautiful acacias waved on every side, forming long hedges between the fields; one stood here and there alone, like a perfect yellow plume. A tribe of laughing jackasses nearly overwhelmed one poor solitary little gum tree, and we all joined involuntarily in their queer peals of seeming merriment: it is catching, and all the funnier coming from such solemn looking birds.

“ ‘You have become quite an old settler by this time, Miss Græme,’ said Lord Penmaen; ‘accustomed to cherries with their stones outside, and a broiling hot Christmas Day. Have you made many friends among the ladies?’

“ ‘Not many.’

“ ‘You find they think more of dress

and amusement, than the women in Scotland do.'

" 'Yes; and it is not a high class of men as yet, whom they have to live up to; your sex regulates our standard of mind and thought,' I replied.

" 'I am afraid we do,' he answered; 'yet the first to rail at the frivolity of women are the men who do their best to encourage it.'

" 'While a man of real talent is always merciful to our deficiencies, and is at least silent about them, where by his efforts he has been unable to amend them. He has the acuteness, also, necessary to appreciate what is good in us, and does not unduly exaggerate the advantages that are not of our own making.'

" 'Your beauty, the gift that comes perfect from the Creator's hand, and which no art can improve,' he answered, with one of his sunniest smiles; 'beauty is a great pleasure, whether we find it in a fellow creature, or in

a sunset like that.' He pointed to the side, where a long line of purple hills lay on the horizon, and the huge pile of the Yarra Bend rose from a belt of rich foliage in the middle distance, a long sweep of brilliantly green meadow land stretching between us and the building; the bend of the Yarra reflecting sunset hues beyond, and a line of gums showing up their red bark in glowing colour. The lengthening shadows lay upon the grass, and the tints of earth and sky harmonised in rare perfection.

" 'That is the lunatic asylum, isn't it?' Lord Penmaen asked; 'beautiful to look at, but so sad to think about, in a young land like this; by-the-bye, I am charged to look after a young fellow who is out here, his father is most anxious about him. Carmichael, do you know him?'"

"Who can he be, this Lord Penmaen?" said Donald, impatiently; "to know old Carmichael? Go on, Edith."

She looked up, he was flushed and excited ; she half repented having read him what seemed like unnecessary details on Maggie's part.

"Go on," he said ; "it is waxing sensational."

"When we arrived at Thornbush, I was preparing to return to the Mauleverers', but the father put his hand on my arm.

"Come in, and do the honours of your improvements, Maggie,' he said, decidedly. At the sound of my Christian name, Lord Penmaen turned, but said nothing ; then he walked into the parlour, and surveyed it with evident pleasure.

"This is something more than I expected,' he said ; 'I would not have believed the old hut could be so metamorphosed. Is it all your handiwork, Miss Græme ?'

"Every bit,' answered the old man, tapping his stick on the new carpet ; 'you will not object to leave me in such luxury, David ?'

“ ‘ I object to leaving you altogether,’ said his son, laying his hand affectionately on the old man’s shoulder ; ‘ but if it must be, this degree of comfort, and the thought of such a friend near you greatly reduces the pang of parting.’

“ The little maid, whom I had engaged to come in and wait on them, had prepared a simple homely meal. I went out to infuse the tea, and felt intuitively as soon as I returned that they had been talking about me. Lord Penmaen rose, and moved my chair.

“ ‘ My father tells me you come from Edinburgh, Miss Græme ; your face seemed familiar to me, in a slight degree, from the first.’

“ I felt my cheeks grow crimson, but I could not summon up courage to tell him how familiar his face was to me.”

Donald rose, and placed his hand on Edith’s shoulder, then slipped into a seat beside her on the sofa, and put his arm round her ;

his face full of eager impatience to hear more.

“‘My father lived in a farm not far from Edinburgh; I have often met you in the streets of that town,’ I replied; ‘yours is a face that everybody knows there.’

“It was his turn now to grow red, but he said no more. The meal went on, as meals will do, under the most painful and embarrassing circumstances; the old man watched me keenly; perhaps a suspicion may have crossed the minds of both that I also had reasons for not returning to England; the idea fretted me, and made me nervous; yet still my tongue refused to speak. I got up at last, and put on my bonnet; Lord Penmaen rose also, and took his hat.

“‘It is not far,’ I said, ‘I constantly go home alone.’

“‘You must not refuse to let me do this small service for you,’ was his reply.

“I said ‘good night’ to Mr. Cartwright.

When we were outside the gate, Lord Penmaen put my hand within his arm ; it was done kindly, almost respectfully ; there was no reason why I should withdraw it.

“ ‘ Tell me how you came to be here, Miss Græme,’ he said, after we had gone a little way in silence ; ‘ if it be want of means, that thus banishes you from your home and parents, anything that I can remove, gratitude for my dear father’s sake demands my utmost efforts to overcome the obstacle ; money, influence, time, all are at your disposal if you wish to return.’

“ He evidently thought I was not in fault, I knew it by his tone ; but still I could not speak, and burst into tears instead. He let me have my sobbing out, and then said—

“ ‘ I do not ask your confidence, if you do not care to give it, Miss Græme ; but I am sorry for you, you are young to be battling with life alone, out here ; my father has told

me how bravely you work for others; let me do something for you.'

" 'Indeed you cannot help me, it is not in the power of any man,' I answered; 'it is best for me to remain here, at least for awhile longer. You know the Priory, Mrs. Ramsay's house?'

" 'Yes,' he said, in a low voice, and I felt his arm tremble.

" 'And Donald?'

" 'Yes, yes, yes,' he exclaimed, turning suddenly round, and seizing both my hands. 'and you are the Maggie I have heard of from Mr. Aleck Seton! Where were my brains that I did not think of it before? Maggie Græme! And you know Miss Ramsay!'

" 'I do, and I love her, and you loved her, as—'

Edith threw down the letter with a cry, and strained her trembling hands to her

throbbing temples. "Read it, Donald," she said, "it is he, my own, my noble Montague! Lost to me, perhaps for ever! Fool, fool, that I was!"

Donald, scarcely less agitated than she, took up the letter and read on—

"It was indeed the well-known advocate, Montague Dewar, *alias* Mr. David Meredith, *alias* Mr. David Cartwright who had come to solve the riddle of my old man's history. I had no difficulty in explaining the rest during the remainder of our walk. His true interest and tender sympathy with all that lies nearest to my heart was like balm to a gaping wound. Donald, you have no truer friend than he. How we shook hands when we came to the Mauleverers'!"

"He need not have been quite so gushing," Donald said, with the merriest smile that had sat on his lips since Maggie left England.

“Edith, this is fact stronger than fiction !
Dear sister, we used you cruelly !”

“It was my own fault, Donald ; if I never see him again I have only myself to thank.”

Edith had regained her composure, but her face was pale as death.

“We shall see him again,” Donald said, smoothing her hand with loving tenderness ;
“but now for the end of this astonishing letter :—”

“Next morning he came again to fetch me to breakfast, and explained to the Mauleverers that they could not get on without me. As we sat exchanging reminiscences, and making new discoveries every minute, Mr. Cartwright listened eagerly, and demanded explanations about everybody ; especially when you were the topic of our conversation, dear Edith. You should have heard Lord Penmaen praise your paper in ‘Magnus,’ dear friend. There may be useful, happy days in

store for you yet ; and I may live to be proud of my early friendship. Both declare I must be with them as much as possible, and the days seem wonderfully happy, somehow the difference of rank between us seems annihilated, or bridged over by fine tact and gentle courtesy. 'We have all gone through the furnace of trial, and that has reduced us alike to fine gold,' Lord Penmaen says. Father and son are full of plans, and I seem bound up in them all. I am under promise not to reveal them ; Lord Penmaen reserves that as his own privilege, to be done in his own fashion. Mr. and Mrs. Mauleverer have been told everything, which is much pleasanter for me, and he and Lord Penmaen get on famously. She is delighted to hear him talking with a kindred spirit, and her growing admiration for her husband is, I feel, one of the surest guarantees for their continued happiness. I have promised to take up my abode at Sarsaparilla Cottage, as we

have named Mr. Cartwright's little house, as soon as his son takes his departure. He wants more constant watching than I can give him at the Mauleverers'; even the joy of seeing his son has told upon him, and now Mrs. Mauleverer is better I can leave her with comfort. The parish will still get all my spare time. It doesn't seem after all that I am destined to be a governess. Lord Penmaen has been to see Harry Carmichael; he is just home, has made better arrangements for his comfort, and writes by this same mail to his poor parents. Good-bye.

“Your affectionate

“MAGGIE.”

“Where can Lord Penmaen's letter be, I wonder,” said Donald, not altogether free from a little lurking jealousy, as he thought of the plans Maggie was bound up in, “let us go and hear if Balfour hasn't forgotten to deliver it.”

They found him on the balcony ; he gave a broad smile at Donald's suggestion.

"I have had an enclosure from an old friend," he said, handing a letter out of his pocket, "but I was bound by a solemn promise not to deliver it until a certain letter from Australia had been read ; do you think that was the one meant I brought you from Zermatt ? It is. Then it's all right. A fine pickle I should have been in had it miscarried, Miss Ramsay. Now you think I may hand this over to you ?"

Edith knew the well-known writing. She could not trust herself to read it there, but carried it off to her bedroom. When she joined Donald and Mr. Balfour at supper, the radiance of a heart at peace sat on her brow, and spoke in every tone and movement.

"Is it all right ?" Donald asked, catching her hand.

"All right ; he wants us to go back with him to Australia."

“ With him ? Where is he ? ”

“ I think Mr. Balfour could tell,” Edith answered with an embarrassed blush.

“ If you have no objection to a *soupée à huit yeux*,” he said gaily, “ there’s a fellow in my room who I think would gladly join us.”

“ I have none, whatever,” said Donald.

“ Silence speaks consent, eh ? ” Mr. Balfour said to Edith, “ then I will go and fetch him.”

CHAPTER XIII.

" Yet for necessity of present life,
I must show out a flag and sign of love."
" How silver sweet sound lovers' tongues by night,
Like softest music to attending ears."

THERE is no need to tell the reader who formed the fourth at the *partie carrée* at the Riffelberg that evening, nor to explain the *chance* that threw Mr. Balfour into the society of the brother and sister for the month they were together in Switzerland, nor of the letters to Maggie, which kept Lord Penmaen *au fait* of their movements and well-being ; nor, lastly, of the convenience the overland route is to impatient lovers, and to Australians in general, who are not tied by want of means. Mr. Balfour was but carrying out a scheme of help for Edith's benefit, planned out between Lord Penmaen and himself, when the former found out it was to be the Ramsays' destination for the summer, and

Mr. Balfour's head-quarters for a series of autumn rambles. This is how he could plan his own visit to be the postscript to Maggie's letter, after the enclosure to his friend prepared her for his sudden appearance. These are wonderful times, and startling coincidences and marvellous surprises may be easily calculated by a head by no means so long and so well filled as Lord Penmaen's.

Thus it came to pass that after supper was over, Mr. Balfour and Donald discreetly engaged in a deeply interesting literary discussion, which detained them in the *salon*, while the lovers took possession of the balcony. They had the whole glorious panorama of snow-mountains lighted up for them by "the silver moon," and to their credit, be it said, cold glacier, and silent peaks, and dark valleys were not lost upon them. It was not until all had been enthusiastically appreciated that these long-tried thankful souls glided into the discourse so interesting to them-

selves, but which always sounds a little foolish to others. Only bits shall be taken out of it here and there, which are necessary for the story.

“Why did you not tell me your secret, David?” Edith asked, at the very beginning of their talk over the troubled past, “it would have saved us both much suffering.”

“I have not been in Scotland for nothing,” he answered, “and shall answer your question by another. What advice did you get from Lady Carshalton, or rather from her husband? for I am sure it was a point she could not decide herself. She referred to him.”

“She did,” replied Edith; “and put a case to him almost parallel with your father’s, and—”

“He said at once an engagement under such circumstances could not continue,” put in her lover.

“Yes. Oh! it was cruel, and hard upon you, dearest.”

Edith hid her face on his shoulder.

“ You do not wonder I did not tell you,” he answered, in a low voice. “ It seemed cruel when it came ; it was hard to bear,” he said, as his grasp round her tightened, “ I often thought during that dreary time death would have been easier to endure ; but I knew I was not the only sufferer. Had you trifled with other men, Edith, it would have gone hard with me ; but, darling, a true woman gives her heart but once. I knew you could not have done otherwise, as matters stood. There is a stern, but natural justice in the universal execration of crime, that helps more than can be told in its repression : only when the blot touches ourselves, the iron enters deeply into the soul. The sight of you, painful as it was, after our engagement ceased, kept my hope and trust alive. Your eyes always spoke the truth, Edith, as I hope they speak it now, when they tell me you are happy.”

Here a good deal must be skipped. It is not fair to listen and tell tales out of school, especially the school of love; after the training of trial, it is too sacred.

"I saw you a great deal oftener than you or any one else imagined, Edith; when not with my father, whom I visited two years ago, I was generally not far away. People put my absences down to foreign travel, and I had often some trouble in eluding their questions—especially Miss Honey Vinegar's, who has the persistency of a fly in sticking to unsound places, and the sharpness of a Queen's counsel in ferretting out inaccuracies of detail: that woman missed her vocation in not being a lawyer. Did you ever suspect, by the way, that she had a matrimonial design upon Uncle Aleck?"

"Mamma and Donald used to talk about it, but I would not believe it: people are too severe upon old maids."

"Nevertheless, for once the world was not

uncharitable; your uncle had to undeceive her with regard to his intentions, about which she demanded an explanation, when you were staying at Craigstane that Christmas. He told me the whole story."

"I must say it rather served him right, David. I never understood why he invited her."

"Just out of kindness;—she lives all the year round in lodgings, and is seldom asked out for a visit. He thought it would be a treat to her to be comfortable for a few days. His heart is so good, Edith."

"But wasn't the invitation a little like setting a plate of delicious mouldy cheese in the way of an innocent mouse, with a wire shade over it?—sight and smell, with deprivation at last?" asked Edith.

"A savoury comparison, not inelegant," he answered, laughing. "We can afford to forgive her now, but she certainly nourishes your mother's prejudice against me."

"I have never told you my secret," Edith said, in a low voice; "do you not remember asking me during that miserable drive to Carshalton House, whether there was nothing I concealed from you?"

"Yes, every word spoken then seems burnt into my memory;—but perhaps it was no secret to me, dearest. I fear I basely traded on what was a certainty, merely to find something to balance my unworthiness to possess you."

"Did other people guess it, do you think, David?"

"No. I was struck by your mother's uncertainty of temper, and drew conclusions. One day I asked Nannie whether it was not the case? She did not deny it. My anxiety for you, Edith, must be an excuse for my curiosity, or rather for my concern, at such a shadow resting continually on the woman I loved."

"Nannie always took your part, David;

she dared say much more to my mother on the subject than I. Did you bribe her in good old Spanish fashion ?”

“Only by taking an untold interest in her ‘bairns;’ it was her weak side, and being mine as well, it was only natural to indulge her now and then by praising them. Poor Donald ! what a wreck he has become !”

Edith buried her face in her hands.

“Could we have averted his fate ?” she asked, as if all wisdom lay in the oracle once more open to her queries.

“It is a difficult question to decide under the circumstances, and while the customs of society remain as they are, we cannot force the world to give up the habit of putting the bottle to their neighbour’s mouths, but, individually, much may be done by example. As a landlord, I hope to do something, and my wife will have enormous influence with other women of all classes—I am certain of that. We shall be called odd and mean and narrow-

minded, but long experience has taught me that signifies little."

"No one really likes or respects you less, David."

"I trust not," he said; "one only cares for what people think, as a matter of possessing more or less influence over them for good; there are only a very few whose approval I covet now—my father, Uncle Aleck, yourself."

"And Miss Honey Vinegar," put in Edith; "she is hot on the subject."

"Her abstinence savours of that cheese you alluded to before," said Lord Penmaen; "but as one good result of her conversion to total abstinence principles, her nose is not near so red as it used to be. Abstinence is better than any cosmetic, if those getting into years would only think so. All the pretty old ladies I know, who remind one of snow flakes in their exquisite fragility, have been nearly or entirely abstainers. We shall

be charming, both of us, when we grow old and white headed, Edith."

Here a great deal more unsubstantial talk ensued, illustrated by stroking of chestnut locks, and something worse or something better—whichever adjective seems most consonant to the individual feelings of readers on such subjects.

It is often difficult to decide what is best, or whether what is true to nature, ought ever to seem improper? or whether what is improper, is ever natural? Who is sure about that either? things get a little turned upside down, or tilted ever so little on one side from an altogether unnatural point of view, and the strangely constituted life led in this nineteenth century.

Then the talk passed on to Donald and Maggie.

"What a bright, beautiful face she has," Lord Penmaen remarked; "I found my

father just bewitched by her. I believe, indeed, he acknowledged to me that he had formed all sorts of schemes about my falling in love with her. Maggie must often have been amused at his broad hints before my arrival. As soon as the truth about both of us came out, he gave up his little plan with the patient docility that is now one of his most touching characteristics. I am not sure whether Donald might not live some years in the climate of Australia. Would she marry him, do you think, Edith?"

"I cannot say; I could not ask her, neither do I think Donald would venture."

"I have a pet scheme. My father will not return to England—the old charm will regain its hold over both Maggie and Donald when they meet again. His very weakness will appeal to her woman's nature, and the three might stay at Thornbush together."

"We must not all remain, I suppose," Edith suggested, with the feeling that her

future husband would be enough for her, and that thus they might be all united.

“I fear not, darling,” he answered; “there is plenty of work cut out for both of us at Penmaen; years will not suffice to undo all the mischief that has taken root under my predecessor. I gave most of the old servants their pensions, and dismissed them at once; gross evils remain to be amended—the cottages are in ruins. I found one family of eight members living in a cottage consisting of two rooms—beds, cupboards, children, a cat, kitten, and dog, all huddled *en masse* under a roof with a hole a young donkey might have fallen through. The wife had appealed to bailiff and landlord in vain. She was told, if she did not like the house there were plenty who would. I could not have believed such hovels existed in any part of the United Kingdom out of Ireland. Picturesque for artists, but a shame to any landlord. The new agent already has

his orders ; but I must run over and see how he gets on before we are married, unless we make it our wedding trip."

"I do not think Donald must be left," Edith answered; "he is much better, and this letter has cheered him. But I think you must go alone; we can afford to consider him now our own lot is so bright; besides Willie and his wife are coming soon."

"Things look brighter for the family all round," said Lord Penmaen, "except for poor Donald. Who would have dreamed of Willie's turning out so well?—there is a strange equality in the lots and lives of men. Nellie is the best wife he could have had—the merriest and the most natural of all the clever clique in Edinburgh—not a bit pedantic, yet thoroughly well read, and well educated; a pattern Scotch girl, but not equal to—"

Dear ! dear ! everything is a peg for these lovers to hang compliments to each other

upon. On one occasion things were not going so smoothly as with Edith and Lord Penmaen, and it applies here when these lovers are making pretty speeches, two others were spooning—that is not a proper word, can be found in no dictionary, is downright slang in fact, which ought not to be written, far less printed—down by a point of the English coast, where a strong current running round the Ness has deepened the shore, and enables a ship to come so close inland that only a few yards separate it from pedestrians on the beach. A vessel rounded this point just as the setting sun was tinting her spars and rigging with gold.

“How beautiful she is!” exclaimed the lady; “I can imagine nothing more graceful.”

“Unless it be yourself, dearest,” replied the enamoured swain.

“Indeed, I totally disagree with you; the comparison is ridiculous,” replied the fair

one ; “ I am not graceful, and never shall be. It is absurd to talk such nonsense. We think so differently on every point, it would be better for us to give up our engagement.”

She stuck to her text ; it was given up, and they both married other people.

When, however, this little episode had passed over more happily, Edith asked—

“ How did you manage to keep your change of fortune so quiet ? When did Lord Penmaen’s death take place ? ”

“ Last February, just as Donald came home, and you were involved in the double anxiety about Mrs. Ramsay’s illness. The notices of his death, probably never met your eye, and if they did, his distant relative, David Meredith, would have had no significance to you. I doubt if a single person in Edinburgh knows of his identity with the advocate, Montague Dewar. It will come out in time ; some one else will reap my professional harvest, which I consigned to other hands on

the plea of urgent business. It was urgent in the first instance. I never saw more piteous anxiety to right the wrong, more fear lest it should be too late to do it, than my predecessor showed. He must have had some thought of propitiating offended god-head in what he did. All his harshness to my father, my poor mother, and myself lay like lead on his guilty conscience. To my surprise, the will naming me his heir was made fourteen or fifteen years ago, long before I settled in Edinburgh; but he had been too proud to acknowledge his repentance until he stood on the verge of the grave. Every debt and mortgage was cleared from the estate; that accounts, in part, for the miserable tenements and farm buildings. When I feel tempted to regret his silence, which would have enabled me to claim you sooner, it is balanced by the thought that, but for the necessity of working for my father I might never have gone there, never

have seen you, never felt the bliss of possession after the torture of long waiting. Ninety-five years of persistent wickedness and hardened worldliness had not effaced one spot where justice still could find root; but I hope not to witness another such deathbed. He must have had an iron constitution to have survived the excesses of years. Latterly he refrained from drinking immoderately; he knew it must kill him, and was afraid to die, not that any better motive found an echo in his heart. For years, no lady had entered the house. You can fancy the heathendom encrusted over such a nucleus of evil. The clergyman of the parish, single-handed, could do little; there was no school, no thought for the poor, no reverence for sacred things. Edith, we have a life's work before us to undo the tithe of mischief one man set on foot. I found my father still remembered, and not unkindly thought of. 'Poor young Mr. Meredith! he was not to

blame with such an example,' fell from many lips ; and from the first I established the fact of my relationship to him. I had suffered enough already from concealment ; do you think I was right ? ”

“ Entirely,” she answered.

Thus talking, the shades of night gathered over the huge snow peaks, and with thankful hearts they sought repose after an eventful day.

CHAPTER XIV.

"All places that the eye of heaven visits,
Are to a wise man ports and happy havens.
Teach thy necessity to reason thus ;
There is no virtue like necessity.
Look, what thy soul holds dear, imagine it
To lie that way thou go'st ! not whence thou camest,"

OF all the chapters in a story, the concluding ones are the hardest to write. Like the concluding act of a play, when the spectators are on the move, some haunted by the dread of losing the last train, others anxious to avoid the final crush in getting out, the actors are tempted to hurry over their parts, even to miss whole unimportant scenes, in order to give the uncourteous audience, flying, maybe, over the backs of the seats, the benefit of the most telling incidents. The true actor, the one who plays for the love of his art, will take no heed, but go on unconsciously to the end, for the sake of the reverent attention of the few—critics, perhaps—

who are not actuated by such mean motives. So, for the sake of the few readers who have been faithful so far, let the loose threads whereby some of the lesser personages are attached to the narrative be gathered up and carried to a conclusion before the curtain drops.

Mr. Alexander Seton is seated at his breakfast table, and Nannie, who has been left under his charge, during the absence of the travellers, stands at his summons beside the sideboard. Mr. Seton has a heap of letters on the cloth, and one open in his hand.

“Take a chair, Mrs. McClacherty; I have news for you, you had better not stand.”

“It’s no sair news, I ken that by the glint o’ yer ee; ye canna deceive me, Mr. Seton, it’s about my bairns.”

“Nay, it’s about mysel’, Nannie.”

“Weel, weel, an’ canna you bring it oot? Is it sae muckle it winna come?”

"I have had a letter, as you perceive, Mrs. McClacherty."

"That's naethin' uncommon; ye hae plenty ilka post."

"But this is from a lady."

"And wha kens gin ye no hae plenty o' sic too? Ye're an unco' quiet man, but there's nae tellin' what the quietest and auldest may come to; gin it's no a proposal, as they ca' it, frae Miss Honey Vinegar; ye might do waur an' marry e'ee noo."

"E'en noo, Mrs. McClacherty! Ye forget to whom ye're speakin'—to a man in the prime of life!"

"Ye were aye a braw man, Mr. Seton, but ye're no young the day. Gin it were Leddy McTaggart, wi' her bonny bit property tied till her tail, and free to leave as she will, it might come to the bairns sune or syne."

"Bairns, Nannie; you think of nothing else but your bairns! I may have some of my own yet."

“More shame on ye an’ ye do, Mr. Seton. What for suld an auld man get a lot o’ skirlin’ lads and lasses round him, wi’ one foot i’ the grave, only to leave ’em a’ for a puir bit wifie to mismanage.”

“Ah! well, Nannie, you may be right. I’ll think, at any rate, a little longer before I commit myself; but I really have a proposal from Miss Honey Vinegar.”

“I hae nae doot it isn’t the first by a good many frae her,” replied Nannie; “she’s ay castin’ sheep’s eyes at Craigstane, an’ thinkin’ it wad be bonny to house her auld banes i’ this cozy hoose ingle; but ye’ll no marry her, I’m sure, nor ony ither woman. Ye’re aye as fond o’ the bairns as mysel’.”

“Well, Nannie, I am fond of them, and of you, too, and there’s no hoodwinking you. Miss Honey only wants me to take the chair, and make a speech at the next temperance meeting. I think you can trust me with the lassies; but, Mrs. McClacherty—”

"Weel, weel, can ye no let the auld bodie ken hoo it gangs wi' the bairns wi'out mair claverin'?"

"Do you think you could make up your mind to a journey to Australia, Nannie?"

"I tak my auld limbs round the world to 'Straley? Na, na, Mr. Seton."

"Could you manage as far as Germany, do you think? Suppose I wanted you to go and take care of me."

"We might start on them condeetions; but I'm thinking ye'd sune be the blither o' the twa, and hae to tak care o' me. But what sall be dune when we get to Germany?"

"Bring a titled lady into the family, Nannie, with a fine estate and an ancient name, two or three degrees above Lady McTaggart."

"It's no my Donald," said Nannie, musing; "he loes Maggie Græme; it canna' be Miss Edith, for she loes Montague Dewar, and

baith are faithfu' ; I ken that, weel eneuch." Nannie was trying to read Mr. Seton's face.

" Huntingtower is mine Jeanie."

sang he, with the remains of what had once been a fine voice.

" It's no bonny, when the jackdaw tries the merlin's sang," said Nannie maliciously. " Can ye no tell me in braid Scotch what ye hae to say."

" You are downright rude Mrs. McClacherty ; I have a great mind not to tell you at all."

" Then I had better gang doon ; the raspberry jam is on the fire, an' Janet bade me watch it."

" Know then, Mrs. Annie McClacherty, of Tanerchiemuchty, in the shire of Kincardine, that Miss Edith Ramsay is shortly to be married to Lord Penmaen, of Penmaen, in the county of Caerlyonshire, in the principality of Wales ; and that the pleasure of

our company, yours and mine, Mrs. McClacherty, as well as that of Lord and Lady, and the Honourable Miss Lucy Carshalton, together with Mr. and Mrs. William Ramsay, is requested to see the ceremony performed, at the residence of the British Ambassador, *i.e.*, on British ground, in the City of Munich, on the 8th day of September, in this year of grace, 187—. Moreover, that you are to find Lady Penmaen, elect, a maid among your own kith and kin, if possible, who understands dressmaking, hairdressing, eyebrow-dressing, padding, stuffing, and complexion dressing—that's the style, isn't it; and who has no objection to travelling. Why Nannie! you don't look half pleased!"

"I'll no say I'm not pleased, gin ye're content, Mr. Seton; but them things ain't my Miss Edith's style. She hae got nae-thin' about her, either inside or out, that's not real."

"What in Heaven's name would the woman

have more ? A fine fortune, a fine man (so I understand, though, for the matter of that, men and women are all handsome for these occasions), and a title ; that at least ought to gain your Scotch heart, Nannie."

"Ay, ay, it's a' vera guid ; but hae ye nae thocht for the puir chiel, that hae lo'ed her sae lang ? It is no' like ye, Mr. Seton. I aye thocht that ye had a muckle fancy for Maisther Montague Dewar ; a quiet man is better an' riches an' fine hooses."

"But the title, Nannie ; Lady Penmaen, of Penmaen—none of your trumpery leddies, a knight's dame—but a real peeress ! Miss Edith will grace the position don't you think ?"

"Ay, sure ; but I'm no certain she'll be happy."

"Well, you women are a stiff-necked generation. I did'nt know you were so fond of Montague Dewar."

"Could onybody leuk i' his kind, quiet,

'een, and not be ay' thankfu' to trust him wi' the best and dearest there were to give. He is no ordinaire man, Mr. Seton, an' ye ken it weel eneuch, wi'out my tellin' ye sae."

"Well Nannie, suppose Mr. Montague Dewar and Lord Penmaen were the same person! Would your objections be quite done away with then?"

Nannie rose, and came to the table; there was a perceptible tremor through her portly person; she leaned on it for support.

"Mr. Seton, an' ye're no jokin; if the douce gentleman Montague Dewar be a lord, I'll gang to the ends o' the warld to see him married wi' my bairn."

"I am in sober earnest, bless your faithful old heart, Nannie;" and Mr. Seton rose, and shook the old servant's hand in both of his, while a tear trembled in his eye. "You may rejoice as much as you like, and I joy with you."

"The Lord is aye guid to them that love

Him," said Nannie devoutly ; " there'll be braw times for a' near 'em ; they hae baith borne the yoke in their youth, and their old age shall be fat and flourishing—and Maisther Donald—"

" Is better. As soon as the wedding is over they will all start for Australia, where business calls Lord Penmaen, and they hope much for him from the voyage."

" He'll find his lassie there, said Nannie ; Miss Edith was aye fond of her ; gin the puir laddie had gane, yon time she left, Mr. Seton—"

" Yes, Nannie, but we cannot foresee what is coming ; we must hope even now ; he is steady enough at present."

" He'll be a' richt noo to the end, I dinna misdoot him ; but it's sair, sair, my bonniest bairn maun dee sae young."

" The climate in those parts does much for cases like Donald's," said Mr. Seton ; " many live who must die in England. I believe you'll find yourself there one day, Nannie."

“I’ll no undertake to contradict ye ony mair, Mr. Seton. It’s a wonderfu’ warld ! Perhaps I micht get a fresh feu o’ life mysel, wha kens ?”

And thus matters were arranged ; Lord Penmaen met the whole party, after his flying visit to England, at Munich, and there Mr. Balfour performed the wedding ceremony. Then the bride and bridegroom, accompanied by Donald, Mr. Aleck Seton and Nannie, found their way by easy stages to Trieste where a yacht awaited them, and the late autumn was passed among the Ionian Islands and the classic shores of Greece ; and then Mr. Seton and Nannie returned to England, while the three others tarried on the Nile, and later found their way to Melbourne, just as the extreme heat of the Australian summer ended.

It was a lovely evening in March. Mr. Cartwright and Maggie stood in the garden at Sarsaparilla Cottage, shading their eyes

from the setting sun, when a cloud of dust in the distance, and the noise of carriages, prepared them for the sight of waving handkerchiefs. Lord Penmaen was standing up; he just caught sight of the two, and was the first also to spring out and receive his father's words of welcome and blessing. Then Edith, who had forgotten to get out—too interested to think of anything but those two hearts, true as ever in their love to each other—was helped down and clasped in the old man's arms. And Maggie? She had gone forward to the carriage, and stood looking at Donald, and he at her with hands tightly knitted together. He is changed, her once handsome Donald—thin, bowed, shrunken; but a strange beauty has dawned in the deep, dark eyes, and Maggie knows at once he will be hers but for a short while. She is more beautiful than ever; he owns it as his head sinks on his breast before her.

“You are tired, dearest,” she says as he

feebly reaches the ground and she puts his arm in hers, "come here for a moment."

She leads him to a shaded bench in the tangle of garden shrubs, and no eye but One sees, no human ear hears what passes between them during that sweet yet painful hour of reunion.

"I must marry him, Edith," Maggie is saying in a low voice as the trio are departing to a house taken for them not many yards away, "I must have the right to be always near him to the end." And so it came to pass.

In the little church at Thornbush Mr. Mauleverer pronounced God's blessing on their union. Joy and sorrow mingled in the thoughts of the wedding party as their merriment was sobered by the shadow looming in the future. Even the winter of Australia was too mild for Donald. Mr. Mauleverer planned a tour for the Riverina, an upland district favourable to consumptive

patients ; and joined the party for a two months' holiday. Before their return, two additional rooms had been added to the Cottage ; the old man's whim to remain in it was gratified, and Donald and Maggie were to live with him.

Two years later a couple of new-made graves, with simple stone crosses, rose side by side in Thornbush churchyard. Little feet pattered round them as Maggie in her mourning weeds laid her tribute of flowers upon them, and they were almost as dear to her as if they had been her own children. The stranger, wandering through that seed-plot of eternity, saw only the inscriptions :—

“DONALD RAMSAY, Aged 23.”

“DAVID OWEN MEREDITH, Aged 67.”

An old couple, lately come from Scotland, lived with the widow in Mr. Cartwright's cottage. In the hospitals of Melbourne, by

the bed-side of the sick, by the widow's and orphan's hearth, there is no one more warmly welcomed than their daughter, Maggie Ramsay.

THE END.





